

































# CRIMES THAT MADE NEWS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*Cavalcade of Justice*  
*The Old Bailey and its Trials*

# CRIMES THAT MADE NEWS

BERNARD O'DONNELL

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**TO MY WIFE**

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## *Crime Man at Work*

IN FILM and in story the crime reporter is invariably depicted as a blasé, ruthless and cynical individual, ever ready to intrude on private grief.

It is true that in no other branch of newspaper work is one keyed up to a pitch of initiative and resource as in that of the crime reporter. He is up against the best brains in daily journalism, he must strive not to be beaten by a rival on another newspaper, and, when it comes to gathering the news in connection with a sensational murder, a daring crime or a baffling mystery, his job is one of the most exacting of all.

It is not true, however, that he is heedless of the agony and suffering of those figuring in the human drama or tragedy of the moment. He wouldn't last a week at his job if he were, for he would lose that precious quality of understanding that enables him to get at the very heart of a story, which is, after all, what he is paid for.

He dare not become blasé lest he lose that human touch which is invaluable both in the getting of a story and its presentation in readable form. In the course of a very long experience I have found that tactful sympathy and practical help will unlock the door to an *inside* story more surely than any amount of uncouth bluster; and the crime reporter in carrying out his inquiries can sometimes bring to light facts which may prevent a grave injustice taking place.

Get the story! That was my creed! Not just the story as it appeared on the surface—the story which anyone can get—but the story *behind* the story. All the salient facts together with the conflict of human emotions which lie behind a crime whether it

be murder, forgery, mail-bag robbery, confidence trick, blackmail, or any of the crimes which figure so largely and so often in the columns of the Press.

How then does one become a crime reporter? One doesn't—at least not just like that. It simply *happens* in the majority of cases, like becoming a tinker, tailor, soldier or sailor. One may drift into specialising in crime reporting in a number of ways. Through attending police courts as the reporter on a local paper and getting to know the set-up of crime and crime detection; through being sent out on inquiries into a crime and revealing a certain initiative in collecting the facts; or by displaying a flair for 'writing up' an important trial in a manner likely to interest the readers of the particular newspaper to which one is attached. It may even be the result of pure accident.

My first introduction to crime was when a Miss Rumbold, a very lovely lady at whose hands I had received many favours was shot by a frenzied lover in the back parlour of a shop in Green Street, Upton Park, London. She did not die, I am glad to say, but I suffered agonies of suspense until she was out of danger. You will better appreciate this when I explain that I was round about seven years of age at the time, while Miss Rumbold was the proprietress of a sweet shop where I used to spend my 'Saturday penny'. In my youthful mind this lady was a goddess who ever tipped the scales generously in my favour when weighing out my two ounces of 'stick-jaw', price one halfpenny, and two ounces of coconut-ice which accounted for the remaining halfpenny.

Those were days indeed when good wholesome sweets could be obtained for four ounces a penny. So you can imagine the blow I suffered, when, on going round to invest my penny on one fine Saturday morning, I heard a loud report and beheld a crowd rushing towards the shop of Miss Rumbold from whence the sound had come. I joined the throng and stood in trembling awe outside that shop. My eyes goggled at the sight of arriving police, and I remember rushing home in terror on seeing a recumbent form shrouded in blankets being carried out and wheeled away on one of the old police stretchers with its full 'length semi-

circular hood screening the occupant from the eyes of the curious.

If you consider my grief somewhat material in origin, I can only plead extreme youth. I only know that I was genuinely glad when Miss Rumbold returned to her confectionery shrine, especially when I found that her hand had not lost its kindly touch when it came to weighing up my ha'p'orths.

Afterwards I never entered that shop without my eyes straying in awed fascination to the door leading to that inner room behind the shop, where tragedy had so nearly robbed me of a generous friend.

I cannot pretend that this incident influenced me in becoming a crime reporter. I was in that stage of boyhood where my ambition was to become either an engine driver or a driver of a fire engine with a pair of dashing steeds careering madly through the streets to the scene of a fire, with the riotous clang of a warning firebell as accompaniment. No! My introduction to journalism took place some years later when I trod the thorny path to Fleet Street as a free-lance. I wrote on any and every subject that entered my mind, always selecting subjects with a news angle. If a rail crash occurred, then I would write up a story on railway disasters of the past; if a sensational poisoning case gripped the imagination of the public, I would write a feature on the unusual aspects of other poisoning cases.

I kept cuttings from newspapers and periodicals on all sorts of subjects which I classified and carefully filed so that I could turn up anything I wanted without loss of time. I had no genius—nothing but the gift of application which enabled me to turn out a story at short notice. I became known to editors who commissioned me to cover this story or that. There were several London evening papers in those days. The old *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Sun*, the *Echo*, the *St. James' Gazette*. There was the *Morning Leader* among the national dailies, with *Lloyd's News* to the fore among Sunday newspapers. All are now defunct. At that time—in the early years of this century—they offered a profitable field to one who could supply the stories they wanted. I attended police courts and the Old Bailey. I got to know court and legal

procedure and became known to police officers, solicitors and counsel alike. I was not consciously striving to become a crime reporter although the subject held a strong fascination for me. The psychology of the thing made its appeal and I could not resist trying to plumb the depths of mind of the poor devil in the dock, whether he or she be murderer or thief.

Not that I concentrated on crime, for nothing came amiss to me in the field of reporting: and while I would write a series of articles on famous trials or notorious criminals, I could with equal facility write a series on 'Commonplace Things Of Interest' for *Answers*, *Pearson's Weekly*, or *Titbits*, explaining in language easy to understand, the origin of fire, how the alphabet came into being, or the beginnings of Parliament. And all the time I was gaining the knowledge essential to a reporter of any kind—how and where to look for the information I wanted. I was sent out to interview well-known people on the subjects for which they were famed. There is a great art in interviewing, for one must set out with one purpose in view—getting the victim to talk on the particular lines required by the paper for which one is writing. In other words inducing them to say what *you* want them to say rather than what *they* would like to say.

As my mind travels back I recall some of my early experiences of sensational trials. The amazing scene that marked the climax of the trial of Robert Wood, a young artist who was acquitted at the Old Bailey on the charge of murdering Emily Dimmock. For five days he had sat in the dock of No. 1 Court at the Old Bailey while witness after witness gave evidence, surely one of the most remarkable figures ever to be tried for his life. I sat fascinated as I watched him; calm, nonchalant, almost contemptuous of two of the most formidable counsel for the Crown, Sir Charles Matthews and Mr. Archibald Bodkin (later Sir Archibald) as they marshalled the evidence for the prosecution.

In the witness-box, Wood unflinchingly stood up to the rigorous cross-examination of Sir Charles, giving his answers readily and clearly, with always a smile on his face. And then, while his own counsel, the late Sir Edward Marshall Hall, made one of the

## CRIME MAN AT WORK

most dramatic closing speeches ever heard in that court, Wood sat back in his chair, calmly sketching judge and jury. Nor did he appear in the least perturbed when the jury returned to deliver their verdict. It was that crucial moment when one word might mean for him the hangman's noose. He stood erect, the cynosure of all eyes and the calmest man in court. It was eight o'clock in the evening, for courts sat late in those days.

Unmoved he heard the foreman of the jury utter the words 'Not Guilty'. Not so the people who were packed within the court. Cheer after cheer rang out. The ushers called for silence but all in vain. Mr. Justice Grantham gazed sternly upon the cheering throng and his lips moved but nothing could be heard above the din which lasted for a full minute. At last it subsided and the judge ordered that Wood be released. At once the dock was besieged by well-wishers. Among them was Hall Caine, the famous novelist who proffered a piece of paper to the smiling artist. The latter dashed off his autograph and handed it back to the author.

Outside the court, where thousands of people had congregated in the cold gloom of that December night just a week before the Christmas of 1907, the scene became almost riotous. Police were helpless to control the enthusiasm of the crowd who greeted the verdict with cheers and the singing of 'He's a jolly good fellow'.

At length Wood was smuggled out of the building into a waiting car, but before he could be driven away, a number of people crowded round the vehicle reaching out to wring his hand and wish him luck.

The memory of other trials comes to mind. The trial of Crippen for the murder of his wife Belle Elmore; of Arthur Devereux who poisoned his wife and two children, and then placed their dead bodies in a trunk which he deposited in a warehouse. I can see him now as he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey, gazing across at the jury from out a pair of innocent-looking blue eyes. Then there was the sensational trial of tall, powerfully-built Stinie Morrison who bludgeoned and slashed to death Leon Beron on Clapham Common, and the equally dramatic appearance in the

dock of 'Brides in the Bath' George Smith, the sanctimonious hypocrite who played hymns upon an organ after drowning one of his wives in a bath. There was too the trial of that notorious adventuress 'Chicago May' and her crook lover, for the attempted murder of Eddie Guerin, the 'Man from Devil's Isle'.

As the recollection of these dramas of the Old Bailey come crowding in upon me I realise how large a formative part they played in my career. I can see now how I became not only a reporter but something of a detective as well. For, from the moment that the first news of a crime came ticking into the office over the tapes—or I was 'tipped off' by one of my contacts—I had to be on my toes.

I made a point of never hunting with the pack. I followed my own line of investigation, dug out little-known details of whatever story I chanced to be on, gathered every available fact about it and filled in the essential background so that when the time was ripe, I could present a complete overall picture of the crime, whatever its nature.

I kept a suitcase ready packed in my office so that I could dash off to any part of the country by day or night. Once on the job I was content to stay on it until the mystery was solved, the mail-bag bandits rounded up, the murderer brought to justice or the crime written off as yet another 'unsolved mystery'. There were no settled hours, and while my story might take only a few minutes to collect, on the other hand I might be away from home for days, weeks or even months.

The first thing I did when going out on a story was to establish good relations with the police. In this respect I count myself fortunate in having established a friendly understanding with some of the most famous officers at Scotland Yard together with leading police officers (C.I.D. and uniform branch) of other police forces throughout the country. I knew Fred Wensley when he was a detective sergeant at the Yard; and I enjoyed his friendship when he became Chief Constable of the Metropolitan Police, the first man from the ranks ever to achieve that distinction. I used to visit him at his home in Palmers Green long after

his retirement almost up to the time of his death a few years ago. George Cornish, one of the greatest sleuths who ever brought honour to Scotland Yard, told me the secret of the lush greenness of the lawn at his home in Southgate. The grass was so rich in colour and so fine in texture that I could not resist asking him how he had managed to get it in such fine condition.

'I planted it all over with mustard seed,' he told me. 'Then when it was about eighteen inches high, I dug it in a couple of feet and then sowed the lot with a good seed.'

Then there was John Horwell, another fine detective, who rose from the ranks to become Chief Constable at the Yard; George Yandell, who handled the sensational fire-raising case with such brilliance; Percy Savage, who brought Patrick Mahon to trial for the murder of Emily Kaye in the bungalow on the Crumbles, Eastbourne; Percy Worth (who also became Chief Constable), who conducted the investigations into the Cheltenham Torso Mystery; Chief Inspector Hambrook who arrested Sidney Fox for the murder of his mother at a Margate hotel; and a score of other famous Yard officers of more recent times, such as Bob Fabian, Ted Greeno, Arthur Thorpe, and my two great friends, Fred Cherrell, late of the Finger Print Bureau and the world's greatest expert in that science, and ex-Commander Hugh Young (now retired)—yet another Yard chief who began his career in the Metropolitan Police as a constable and soared to the highest rank attainable at Scotland Yard. All these I knew and met frequently on various crimes up and down the country.

On occasions, Yard men or officers in the provincial police would give me an item of information by way of guidance in my inquiries, with the proviso, 'But keep it under your hat, Bernard.'

I never failed to do so! Don't count it to me as virtue, but simply as a commonsense view that the long-term policy pays in the end, paving the way for friendly tips in the future. In the same way as I kept faith with the police, so I kept faith with my underworld 'contacts'; for, as I covered every type of crime in the calendar, it was inevitable that I should become acquainted

with crooks of every kind. In many instances I became, the repository of many underworld secrets which I never divulged. During the years that I was steeped in crime—only as a journalist of course—I numbered many gaolbirds and criminals of both sexes among my friends.

There was, for instance, a lady of more than ample girth who was brought from Holloway Gaol to give evidence in a case at the Law Courts involving a bill of exchange of which she was the drawer, the acceptor being a woman whose affairs were placed in the hands of the Receiver in Lunacy. Dorothy, as we will call her, was already serving a twelve-month sentence for false pretences, and I had known her over the years. On completing her sentence she sought me out and I bought a story of her brushes with the law. She was married to an ex-admiral of the Russian fleet, a mild-looking fellow absolutely dominated by his giantess of a wife. Ever and anon she would come along with a hard luck story, and I would give her a pound or two to tide her over. One morning I received a letter. It was from Dorothy.

'Dear Mr. O'Donnell,' (*she wrote*)

'Latest news is, my husband is dead, after nearly twelve months' illness, and no money to bury him or buy a wreath. Could you not try and get the editor to buy a really good interesting story of how a man rose to the highest ranks in the Tsar's Navy (he was a prisoner in the fortress for four months at Port Arthur), admirals and generals committing suicide around him; he was one of the few to come out safe. . . .

I was suitably touched by this effusion, and took it in to Jimmy Tevnan, London Editor of the Empire News.

'See what she's got to say,' he said, and off I went to a house in Bloomsbury where Dorothy had rooms in the basement. There was no reply to my knock, and I thought she might be out making the necessary funeral arrangements or buying a bit of mourning. I decided to wander along Marchmont Street and have a coffee. Then I strolled northwards in the direction of King's Cross.



Suddenly I saw a figure coming towards me carrying a string bag from which protruded the green top of a stick of celery. *It was the dead admiral.*

'You've made a pretty quick return from the grave,' I greeted him, and he looked puzzled.

'I've just been out shopping for the wife,' he told me, and I could tell that he knew nothing about his sudden demise. This was simply another ruse on the part of his inventive spouse to impose on an unsuspecting crime reporter. Maybe she had a good story to tell about her husband's adventures, but I did not buy it.

Most of the amusing crooks I knew were living examples of the axiom that crime does not pay. They were invariably 'broke to the wide' and seldom reluctant to accept the 'loan' of a nimble 'onecer' (£1). On occasions of course they were 'in the money'.

Very early in my career when I lodged in a boarding house in Torrington Square, Bloomsbury, I learned the wisdom of keeping my own counsel. If I say it was a very Bohemian residence where ladies of uneasy virtue resided in well-furnished apartments awaiting the call of the men by whom they were 'kept', I shall not be doing my home an injustice.

These girls were a friendly lot, and often would invite me into their rooms to have a drink and describe to them the drama of the trial then in progress. They had the most inordinate appetite for the more gruesome details which had not come out in court, and myself, being young and maybe impressionable, I was not averse to slaking their thirst for horror.

On a Sunday morning it was the habit for all the lodgers in this gaunt four-storey house to meet at breakfast. On other days, leaving for business at various times, we had breakfast in our respective rooms. I shared a top front room with another young reporter. Quite frankly, we used to look forward to these little Sunday morning gatherings when two or three of the ladies I have mentioned would put in an appearance clad in very revealing and highly-coloured kimonos.

After breakfast if it was fine, we repaired to the garden where we took it in turns to push the girls to and fro on a farnshacke old

swing which had been set up. There was plenty of screaming, plenty of ribald joking and plenty of quite innocent fun. And let me say that while there was no false modesty about our girl-friend lodgers, and they made no secret of their mode of life, they never once made any suggestions that we should accept their favours. It would have been quite easy to have slipped into their rooms, and I am quite sure there would have been no objection so far as they were concerned, just as I am equally sure that the idea never entered their heads. They seemed to regard both my friend and myself as a couple of youngsters with a sense of fun; and left it at that.

One Sunday morning I went down to breakfast as usual and found a stranger standing with his back to the fire. I bade him good morning and then observed hanging over the mantelpiece a very nice oil painting.

‘M-m,’ I remarked by way of starting a conversation. ‘Looks as though the old man (landlord) must have come into some money. I see he’s got a new picture.’

The stranger smiled.

‘A present from me,’ he remarked.

‘In the ‘picture dealing business?’ I asked.

‘No!’ he replied. ‘As a matter of fact it is one of the pictures stolen the other night from that shop in the Strand.’

I looked at him, in sheer amazement! I knew the job only too well, for I had been on the story. What had happened was this. On the Tuesday night of that week thieves had broken into the shop of a stamp collector a few doors from Somerset House and got away with a quantity of valuable stamps. The police were called in, and believe me, throughout Wednesday that locality was a beehive of police activity.

The same night (Wednesday) the picture shop next door was broken into and several paintings were stolen. The thieves in both instances got away without leaving a clue.

And here was this man calmly telling me that the picture hanging on the wall before my eyes was one that had been stolen just a few nights before. I could hardly believe my ears. It seemed such

a foolish thing to do—admit to a perfect stranger that one was party to a burglary.

'Look here,' I began, 'I'm a newspaper man and don't you think it's a bit risky boasting about the theft of this picture to someone you have only just met?'

I shall never forget the glacial look that came into his steel grey eyes as he turned them upon me.

'I don't reckon it would pay you to say much about it outside,' was all he said, and I felt that he was right.

He was a member of the gang which had carried out the two robberies on consecutive nights, and we went around together quite a bit after that. Once he took me to a club situated in a yard just off Piccadilly. It was a pretty tough place, and my last sight, as he dragged me through some back way to the sinister sound of police whistles, was of a man lying under a table bleeding from wounds caused by the jagged ends of a broken bottle.

From which you will gather that the crime reporter must be a good 'mixer' and able to talk the language of pimps and prostitutes, bishops and bookmakers, dustmen and diplomats, scientists or socialites. No human being should be beyond the range of his understanding, nor must he be out of place whatever the circumstances or wherever he may be.

He should know something of anatomy, the symptoms and effect of various poisons, a bit about firearms and ballistics, have a smattering of pathology, and perhaps an idea or two concerning the latest strides in psychiatry. Without this knowledge he cannot, to my mind, hope to do full justice to a story which involves an understanding of these subjects. He should have more than a passing knowledge of the law, and be well acquainted with the procedure and usages in the various courts he may have to attend.

Speaking from a long experience as a crime reporter, I can vouch for the fact that my knowledge of the symptoms of poisons has proved of tremendous assistance when making inquiries into a possible case of poisoning. I have been on more cases of arsenical poisoning than I care to remember, and have thus gained some knowledge of the gradual progress of the symptoms associated

with this most painful method of slaying. The vomiting and diarrhoea and stomach pains; the tingling feeling in the extremities and numbness of hands and feet; the depression and collapse, and in cases of prolonged administration of the poison, the arsenic found in the hair and finger nails of the victim. Very often as a result of my acquaintance with these things I have been able to formulate an opinion and carry out investigations on my own which have played no little part in cases of suspected murder.

I would explain that such knowledge as I possess on these matters has been largely gained through listening to the evidence of experts in these branches of science. And when I remark in passing that at the time of writing—just after the trial of Christie—I have attended 321 murder trials up and down the country, embracing every type of homicide from shooting to stabbing, including every type of killer from strangler to sex-maniac, it would seem inevitable that I must have gained some knowledge of the subjects I have mentioned.

I found ample variety in my life as a crime reporter with its continually changing scenes and people. Different places and different faces. And, apart from crime, when, for example, there happened to be a lull in murder, or crooks became a bit dilatory, I would go out on a bit of what is called 'general reporting'.

Even then there was that mingling of the mundane and adventure; of the commonplace and romance; of the sordid and the glamorous. At any moment of the day or night I was sent out on some inquiry which might yield a meagre paragraph tucked away on an inside page or provide me with a story which was banner-lined on the front page. It might be an inquiry into the dearth of potatoes, an interview with a famous statesman or glamorous film star. A railway crash or an air disaster would send me off hot-foot to the scene of the calamity. Navy week or an R.A.F. display sometimes provided me with pleasant relaxation afloat or ashore. These were the sort of jobs which leavened my life, and perhaps helped keep me from becoming case-hardened. I was always grateful for these 'general reporting' breaks from the sinister, yet when a murder story broke I found myself as keen on getting

'behind' it as any of the police officers engaged in running the murderer to earth.

As every editor of a newspaper knows there is a gripping fascination about crime in general and murder in particular. It may be a matter for regret, but there it is; from the earliest time right through the ages, whether they be written in the immortal verse of Shakespeare or the crisp vernacular of the 'whodunit' writer, murder stories have intrigued readers of all classes, none more so than murder stories in real life. One has only to see the crowds that queue up outside the Old Bailey or any assize court in the country when a murder trial is in progress to realise the tremendous interest taken by the general public. Nor is it simply a morbid interest; no more than is the reading of a detective novel. People are interested in the psychology of the murderer. They want to know what makes him 'tick'. They want to savour the drama of a real trial as opposed to the theatricality of the film or stage version.

The crime reporter merely brings to those who are unable to get a first hand glimpse of a trial, a picture of what transpires within our courts. He writes it up—dramatises it if you like. But long before the criminal is ushered into the dock, the reporter has been busy collecting all the details and background of the crime and the person who is being tried for it. And, just as every crime differs in detail so do crime reporters differ in their approach and treatment of a story. It is the varying details which call for imagination and resource in dealing with them. Every crime man must be an individualist applying his own mentality to dealing with the particular crime under investigation. Yet although his job is the toughest of all in newspaper reporting there is no need for him to be unduly tough or inhuman in his approach.

Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. I have known many murderers in my time, and on more than one occasion have visited them in the death cell. I have also 'nursed' their wives or relatives during the agonising days of the trial and during the subsequent weeks up to the time of execution. I sat up all one night with the wife of a murderer who had been con-

demned to death. In the stress of grief this unhappy woman had succumbed to drink to drown her sorrow. On the night I stayed with her she was in the throes of *delirium tremens* and was seeing bloody hearts all over the mantelpiece.

With the wife of another murderer I went to Mass on the morning of her husband's execution. It was his wish that she should be as near as possible to him during his last dread hour. He felt that in this way the woman he loved would be joining him in Communion in the concluding moments of his life. I shall never forget that journey down to a church less than a mile from Wandsworth Prison where the execution was to take place. It was early in the morning as we drove through the London streets, the only signs of life being a few straggling workers on their way to work. Nor shall I forget the solemn little ceremony that followed our arrival, when the sorrowing wife knelt before the dimly-lit altar praying for the soul of her husband so soon to meet his dreadful end.

When some years ago 'Colonel Barker' became bathed in a floodlight of publicity because of her sensational masquerade as a man, I took her young son into my home so that he should learn nothing of his mother's unhappy plight from any of his schoolmates or from the newspapers. He played with my own boys and remained in absolute ignorance that the person whom he looked upon as his *father* was in fact his mother. And I am glad to relate that he continued in this belief to the day of his death as a night-fighter pilot during the last war.

Again I might have made a story from my intimate knowledge of all the circumstances, but it would only have added to the anguish of the unhappy 'Colonel' and left me with a sense of betrayal.

In the course of my travels I have collected a miniature Black Museum of my own. It contains souvenirs of the crime stories I have covered, such as the amber cigarette holder and case 'left' to me by William Kennedy, who, with Frederick Guy Browne, was hanged for the murder of P.C. Gutteridge in a lonely Essex lane, together with the love-letters he wrote to his bride of a

few weeks from the gloomy depths of the death cell. To remind me of the Cheltenham Torso Mystery I have the ivory-nobbed malacca walking stick of Captain Butt, supposed to be the victim, whose dismembered body was recovered from the River Severn at Haw Bridge. I have, too, the watch of Brian Sullivan, whose dead body was found at Tower Lodge, Cheltenham, under mysterious circumstances, and who was suspected of having murdered Butt.

Letters from murderers in dozens I have, together with letters from those who have looked upon me as a friend; but none among them so naïve in expression perhaps as that of the obliging William Marwood, whose polite letter to the Governor of Bedford Gaol accepting a job of work is reproduced on page 17.

Very often a reporter is given some information 'off the record', meaning *not* for publication. He respects the confidence and that information is not published until permission is given. For my own part I made it a practice to impose my own 'off the record' ban, by imagining the possible effect on others of breaking a story, and acting accordingly.

With this brief glimpse into the work of a crime reporter, you will probably appreciate that in the course of years he develops a 'nose' for smelling out a story. A single detail or an obscure reference in what may otherwise appear to be an ordinary commonplace news item, will send him hurtling off to some place near or far, to make inquiries into what may blossom into a front-page story, or may prove a wasted effort.

The 'phone bell may awaken him from a dreamless sleep in the middle of the night, to hear the voice of his news editor saying 'Get down to such-and-such a place. The strangled and mutilated body of a woman has been found in the garden of an empty house.'

He sleepily takes down the necessary particulars and 'gets weaving'. No time is lost, and once on the job there is no letting up. The crime reporter must be on his toes from start to finish so that when the suspect is brought to trial—if ever—he is fully equipped with a knowledge of all the 'angles' of the story and of

all the personalities who play a part in it. He must think and act quickly and oft-times resort to a bit of low cunning—in its least offensive sense—in order to put a rival off the scent and get one over him.

Perhaps I can best illustrate what I mean by relating how I was lucky enough to scoop Fleet Street when I got the story of Madame Marie Marguerite Fahmy, acquitted at the Old Bailey on the charge of murdering her Egyptian husband, the self-termed 'Prince' Fahmy Bey.

## *The Tragedy of Madame Fahmy*

NO SETTING so replete for the staging of tragedy, was ever conceived in the mind of man as that in which the shooting of 'Prince' Ali Fahmy Bey took place at the Savoy Hotel, London.

The background was one of angry implacable nature; for, in the early hours of that morning in July, a fury of tropical wildness raged over London in one of the worst storms ever known in the West End. While the boom of rolling thunder shattered the silence, and while vicious streaks of forked lightning played on the streets illuminating them as though by daylight, a terrified woman crouched outside the open door of one of the most luxurious suites in the hotel, her startled eyes gazing down at the body of a man lying groaning at her feet, her fingers grasping a small pearl-handled revolver.

Such was the opening of one of the most sensational stories I have ever been engaged upon, a story which held the front page of every newspaper in the country and soared far above the average in romance and tragedy, because of the colourful personalities of the two chief actors. The victim was known as a 'prince'—although he had no right to the title—and the woman who shot him, his wife, was one of the most beautiful women who ever attracted a wealthy playboy of the East.

During the brief span of their married life they had lived an Arabian Nights existence of splendour and pleasure-seeking; and yet that sobbing, horror-stricken woman who crouched in the lush carpeted corridor of one of London's most sumptuous hotels had undoubtedly slain her husband.

Ali Kamel Fahmy Bey was the son of an Egyptian engineer, at whose death he inherited a fortune of £800,000 which he proceeded to squander in a wild orgy of spending.

His wife was Marie Laurent, a lustrous-eyed French woman whom he had pursued with Eastern passion and eventually married in Cairo.

It was round about two o'clock in the morning on 10th July, 1923, that an hotel porter on his rounds was called to the suite of Fahmy Bey to find a quarrel in progress. The Egyptian showed some bruises and Madame Fahmy pointed to marks on her throat. Things quietened down and the porter went away. He had only just turned the corner of the corridor when, above the boom of Nature's artillery, came the sound of three pistol shots. He hurried back and saw Ali Fahmy lying on the floor, his wife, still in shimmering evening gown and wearing the gleaming jewels which had been the bridegroom's wedding present to her, crouched down beside him.

A friendly hotel employee tipped me off about the tragedy and I was soon upon the scene. I began discreet inquiries. These were by no means easy on account of the station in life of the dead man, and because hotels are not anxious to give undue prominence to any tragedy occurring on their premises. Hence there was a tendency to hush things up as much as possible.

But I was able to gather enough facts about the past career of Fahmy Bey, his inordinate extravagance, and his brutal treatment of Madame Fahmy—to realise that this was going to be one of the most startling stories of all time.

On the one hand it was a story of fabulous palaces in Egypt, of life upon gleaming yachts and in sumptuous hotels, of travels in limousines with all the opulence and insensate luxury of immense wealth at every stage. On the other hand it was a story of the passionate love of the East, cruel in its flaming jealousy, and loathsome in its perversions of sex.

For that is what lay behind the trio of shots fired in the sweltering heat of that tropical storm and in the bleak coldness of an ill-used woman's despair. These facts I gleaned early on in my inquiries.

Fahmy Bey can well be said to have been favoured of the gods from birth. He had all that the world most envies—a handsome

presence, boundless wealth, and a charm that attracted women. He flitted from place to place on the Continent, ever in search of some new thrill. He was known for his mad, reckless spending and his total disregard of convention. From his father he had inherited fabulous wealth, which, even after adverse fluctuations, yielded him £40,000 a year. He kept a fleet of racing boats, a palace at Zamelek on the Nile, a retinue of dusky servants—slaves would be more correct, for he whipped and beat them when the fancy took him.

Yet he loved beauty and worshipped costly things. Before he was eighteen he had spent three fortunes and had innumerable mistresses, tiring of them as quickly as he had fallen victim to their spells.

In Paris he met Marie Laurent, the divorced wife of M. Laurent, and, it was suggested at the trial, the daughter of a French cab driver. The ripe full beauty of the dark-haired Marie captivated him from their first meeting and he conceived for her a passion so strong that he was determined to possess her just as he had possessed other women before her. But this time there was a difference. It may have been that Marie Laurent did not fall to the lure of his charm or wealth so readily as the others, or it may have been that he was more completely in love than he had ever been before.

Whatever it was, in previous instances he had never offered to marry the women who came his way, but now he told his new love that after his return to Egypt he would send for her and they would be married.

As Marie Laurent frankly admitted later on, when giving evidence at the Old Bailey, she did in fact become the mistress of Fahmy and toured the Continent with him. Deauville, Biarritz, Nice, Venice and other expensive pleasure haunts knew them well.

Then Fahmy returned to Egypt; and, although he still maintained his eager desire to marry her, the woman was not so certain of his intentions, although he had been a wonderful lover, and she had found him a most attractive companion.

When her dusky lover reached Egypt he began to bombard her with the most fervid love letters imploring her to go out to him so that she could become his wife. He could not live without her, he declared, and followed up these passion-crazy letters with telegrams saying that he was ill and insisting that she must come to him. At length she journeyed to Cairo where her ship was met by Fahmy. He had not been ill at all, but had used it as an excuse to lure his sweetheart to Egypt. He was deliriously happy at the reunion.

At Fahmy's request she adopted the Moslem religion, and having done so signed the civil marriage contract which made her his legal wife. Later on there was a religious wedding carried out with all the ornate rites and ceremonies of the Moslem faith. The wedding festivities were like a page from the *Arabian Nights*. Sheep were roasted whole, and for days and nights guests feasted on the choicest food and wines that money could buy.

Obviously I had not obtained all these details of the Fahmy story from one source alone. I went to Paris and interviewed Mme. Yvonne Alibert, a sister of Madame Fahmy. I managed to dig out little jig-saw bits of information which I was able to piece together in one coherent story. I learned that almost immediately following the religious ceremony in Cairo the whole aspect of this romance between East and West changed. What had been a land of sunshine became a place of shadow and sorrow. The bride discovered that she was just like any other Moslem wife, a thing who simply existed to minister to her husband's pleasure, a being who had to obey him and do his bidding whatever bestial demands he made upon her. If she refused there were blows instead of honeyed words, cruelty instead of tender caresses. She found that there was none of the freedom which as a Western woman she had been accustomed to. The bride was kept a prisoner, guarded night and day by a dozen black Nubian slaves, who held her in constant terror. When Fahmy deigned to take his wife into the outside world he abused her, and even struck her in public. He insulted her in the presence of menials and made her life a veritable hell. Worse than all he compelled her to submit

to unspeakable sexual practices, which undermined her health and brought her to the verge of physical and mental breakdown.

It was in consequence of the perverted attentions he forced upon her that, upon reaching this country a short time before the tragedy, Madame Fahmy consulted a doctor, who advised her that an operation was necessary.

The doctor was a friend, and he was so concerned about the condition of his patient that, after calling in a well-known specialist, he suggested that she should return to France without delay, so that the operation could be performed there by a noted surgeon.

Madame Fahmy returned to the Savoy Hotel, and with the help of her maid, started to pack her costly gowns and stow away the precious jewels which her husband had given her. Then she told her husband of her intentions.

He flew into a violent rage and forbade her to go. He threatened to kill her.

These incidents were the prelude to the tragedy enacted on that wild July night, the tragedy which led to the arrest of the lovely bride of only a few months.

You can imagine perhaps the tremendous sensation which followed upon the arrest of this beautiful woman for the murder of her husband; especially when it became known during the police court proceedings, that she had made a statement in which she declared, 'I have told the police I did it. I have told the truth. He had assaulted me in front of many people. He has told me several times he would kill me. Many people have heard him say so.'

Here was what amounted to a clear admission of guilt together with a suggested motive.

It was clear to me that this was going to be one of the greatest stories of the day, and—I meant to get it. But how? I realised that every other newspaper would be after the personal story of this unhappy woman. Especially if she was acquitted. There are various ways in which one can establish contact in these cases. It

may mean approaching a relative or friend, or getting in touch with the defending solicitor, and making a clear business proposition either before or after the acquittal.

And when you are up against the best brains of Fleet Street it is an easy matter to overlook some little angle of approach and so be beaten by one of your rivals. It is this which adds zest to the game. I thought things over carefully, and decided on various lines to follow.

I discovered that Freke Palmer, *doyen* of solicitors specialising in criminal cases, had been engaged to defend Madame Fahmy. This Grand Old Man of the courts was an old friend of mine, for we had met on many big cases, and I enjoyed his confidence as one who would respect his wishes. I went to see him. I told him that I was interested in the story of his client and would be prepared to talk big money at the right moment. He shook his mane of shaggy white hair and smiled.

‘Nothing doing—yet,’ he said. ‘Maybe nothing doing at all. Madame Fahmy has friends in high places, and of course there may be others as greatly interested as you.’

I knew it was no good beating my head against the brick wall of Freke Palmer’s integrity, so with a friendly, ‘Well, cut me in on any negotiations,’ I left his office. But I was by no means content to leave the matter there.

As a result of further discreet inquiries I discovered that long before the shooting incident, Madame Fahmy had been in touch with her Egyptian lawyer, one Maître Assouard, who was now in this country attending to some business affairs of his client, and also exercising a sort of watching brief for the accused woman. I learned that she relied on him to a tremendous extent, that he was friend as well as legal adviser, and that he was in constant touch with her. I decided that it would be well to establish friendly relations with the worthy Maître.

This I did putting my cards frankly on the table, telling him what I wanted, and asking his assistance. I pointed out that it would be in his client’s best interests that the full story of her life with Fahmy Bey should be made public, so that the public would

be aware of all the indignities and brutality she had suffered at her husband's hands.

I also mentioned that we should not be niggardly in remunerating Madame Fahmy for the story she alone could tell.

So, long before ever Madame Fahmy was brought to trial in the September of 1923 I was on extremely good terms with one of the men who had access to Madame Fahmy and who had great influence over her. All that I wanted was to be right on the inside of things, to know all that was going on, and to make certain that I should not be 'jumped' by any of my rivals. I knew that Maître Assouard would know all that was happening and would keep me well posted as to the progress of events. He did!

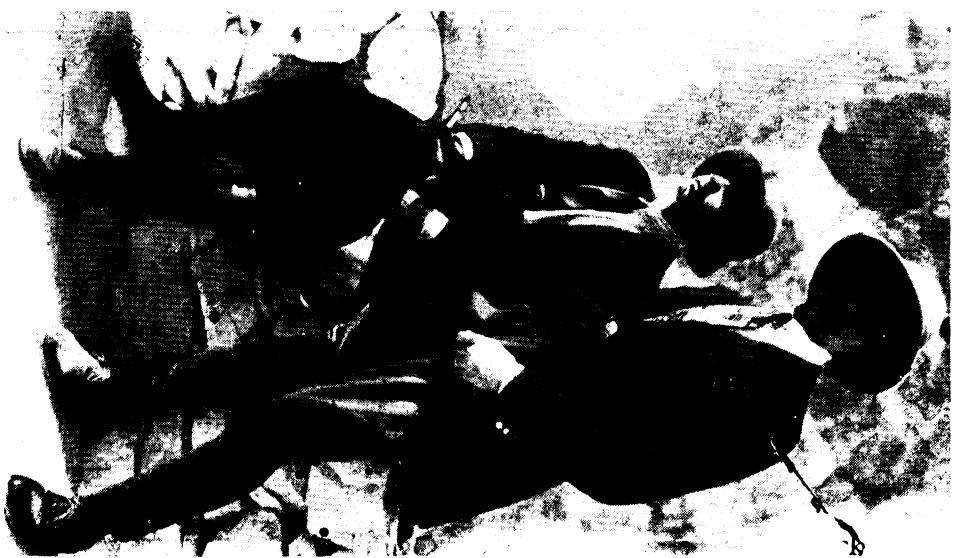
'No word of any information imparted to me in confidence was ever used by me. Not even my own news editor knew what was going on beyond the fact that I had 'got things well in hand'. Consequently Maître Assouard soon realised that he could rely on my discretion and trusted me implicitly. Long before it was mentioned in court, for instance, I knew of the important secret document which Madame Fahmy had written and deposited in the hands of Maître Assouard. In it she declared that months before the tragedy, Fahmy had sworn on the Koran that she should die at his hands. Madame Fahmy had been in such terror of her life that she had written this document insisting that in the event of her death or disappearance, her husband was to be held guilty of her death. Apart from her legal advisors I was the only person to know of the existence of this piece of evidence which was to prove so vital to the defence.'

At length the day of the trial dawned and Madame Fahmy was ushered into the great square dock of No. 1 Court at the Old Bailey, there to stand trial for her life. I can see her now, her slim figure clad in a tailored coat of some black material, with a black fur round her throat, and her dark hair shrouded by a close-fitting black hat.

'She neither spoke nor understood English, so that the charge had to be translated into French for her, as did all the evidence which followed, for it is an axiom of our law that a prisoner shall



Mme. Fahmy, shortly after her acquittal, with Maitre Assouard. ▶



Mme. and 'Prince' Fahmy.



Philip Yale Drew and Bernard O'Donnell on their way to the inquest on Alfred Oliver.  
*Inset:* The cleaner's tab that helped clear Drew.

hear and understand everything sworn to by the witnesses in the case. The sun was shining brightly through the glass-domed roof of the court-room and it seemed difficult to grasp that one was at a murder trial, or that the woman in the dock, so composed except for a slight twitching of the lips, would soon be fighting for her life.

I wondered what her thoughts were as she gazed at the red-robed portliness of the late Mr. Justice Swift, the presiding judge, and the less colourful sheriffs as they entered carrying their posies of sweet herbs.

In the well of the court sat a number of olive-skinned Egyptians, while at the end of counsel's benches sat the austere figure of Mr. Percival Clarke leading for the prosecution, supported by Mr. Roland Oliver, now Mr. Justice Oliver.

Never was a trial more tense with drama than that of Madame Fahmy at the Old Bailey, with that greatest of all defenders, the late Sir Edward Marshall Hall, appearing on her behalf with the late Sir Henry Curtis-Bennett.

With all that forensic eloquence of which he was master, Sir Edward described how on the night before the tragedy, Fahmy had told his wife, 'You shall not escape me. In twenty-four hours you will be dead.' Counsel referred to an anonymous letter received by Madame Fahmy begging her not to return to Egypt and telling her to 'beware the poison phial, the silent weapon which is neither seen nor heard'.

The tragedy itself cannot better be described than in the words of Madame Fahmy as she gave evidence from the witness-box through the lips of an interpreter.

After relating the story of Fahmy's impetuous wooing and her marriage she went on to describe the sudden change in her husband's demeanour towards her. She told of the black guard forever on watch outside her bedroom; of how Fahmy had taken the Koran and swore the terrible oath that he would kill her and that she should die by his hand. Once he fired a revolver over her head three times in succession to cow her into submission to his desires, she said. On another occasion he struck her a blow which dislocated her jaw.

'Why didn't you leave him?' demanded Sir Edward Marshall Hall, her counsel.

'When he was kind I loved him,' was the pathetic reply. 'And he told me that he would have me disfigured with sand and acid flung from a bottle. I was afraid of him. He said I could never leave him.'

And then she drew a graphic picture of that stormy night and of the scene which ended in her husband lying bleeding at her feet.

'I went up to my bedroom alone,' she said. 'By that time the thunderstorm was terrible, and I am afraid of thunder and was nervous. I did not go to bed—I was too afraid. My husband came and knocked at the door. I did not answer at once. He banged on it and shouted, "Open—open—you are not alone."

'I opened the door and asked him for the money for my journey. I was still in evening dress.

'He invited me to go to his room and see how much money he had, and showed me some English £1 notes, and 2,000 francs in French money. I asked him for my expenses to France. He said, "I will if you will do something for me."

'He started tearing off my dress. I ran to the telephone but he tore it out of my hand and twisted my arm . . . Suddenly he seized me by the throat, saying, "I will kill you now." His thumb was in my windpipe. His fingers were round my neck. I was so frightened I tried to get away from him and kicked him and bit him.

'Stepping back he said, "I will kill you." I hit him and ran towards the door. He struck me everywhere and spat in my face.'

It must have been at this moment that the night porter appeared on the scene, and Fahmy showed him the slight bruises he had sustained in this grim struggle.

'I thought he (Fahmy) had gone away,' continued Madame Fahmy, her voice now rising and falling with emotion, 'but suddenly I saw him standing in the doorway—I saw him by means of a flash of lightning which lit up the room. I saw where the pistol

had been put, and when I saw him there I felt very frightened and very weak. He advanced with a very threatening expression, saying: "I will revenge myself——" He tried to spring on me. I put my arm in front of me, and as he was about to spring, I lifted my arm without looking.'

Madame Fahmy was weeping quietly, her head was swaying from side to side, and it was obvious that she was overwrought.

'What happened to the pistol?' urged her counsel kindly. The tears streamed down her face as she replied in an agonised voice:

'My husband was lying on the ground before I knew what had happened. I saw him on the floor and knelt beside him. I caught hold of his hand and said: "Sweetheart—it is nothing. Speak to me—oh, please speak to me."'

A poignant and terrible story, and one that made its impression on the jury. Yet one must not overlook the dramatic strategy of Marshall Hall in his handling of the defence. Two instances stick out in my mind.

A fluent French speaker himself, he was not altogether satisfied that the official interpreter was capable of just giving the right translation of Madame Fahmy's exact words as she gave evidence. There was also another person in that crowded court who held the same views. This was Maître Odette Simon, a French woman barrister and personal friend of Miss Helena Normanton, then a very young woman barrister over here who later achieved great distinction at the English Bar. Very diffidently Miss Normanton sent a note to Marshall Hall intimating that Maître Simon would gladly help in interpreting the evidence of Madame Fahmy, an offer which that astute defender was only too pleased to accept. Behold him then gaining the learned judge's permission to have this trained woman lawyer stand beside Madame Fahmy in the witness box in order to translate her words with every nuance of meaning and inflection of voice.

Again I recall the adroitness with which he produced the secret document to which I have already referred. The document which had been left in possession of Maître Assouard. It was produced

with dramatic effect by Marshall Hall during the re-examination of his client, and *after* her cross-examination by Mr. Percival Clarke had finished. Dated 22nd January, it revealed to the court how for six months before her husband's death, Madame Fahmy had gone in fear of her life at his hands. It read:

'I, Marie-Marguerite Alibert, of sound mind and body, formally accuse, in the case of my death by violence or otherwise, Ali Bey of having contributed to my disappearance.'

'Yesterday, 21st January, 1923, at three o'clock in the afternoon, he took his Bible or Koran—I do not know what it is called—kissed it, put his hand on it, and swore to avenge himself upon me to-morrow, in a week, a month, or three months; but I was to disappear by his hand.'

'This oath was taken without any reason—neither jealousy, nor bad conduct, nor a scene on my part. I desire and demand justice for my daughter and my family.'

The drama was not over yet, however. There was the closing speech of Marshall Hall, an epic of advocacy never excelled in any court of law. In vivid words he drew a picture of Madame Fahmy's life with her husband, and described the crescendo of cruelty and humiliation to which she had been subjected. He limned in colourful phrase the terror of that night, when, 'with the thunder crackling overhead, and the lightning intermittently flooding the darkness, the grim relentless figure of the Oriental husband approached his fear-ridden wife.'

Marshall Hall held the little pearl-handled pistol in his grasp as he spoke; as he came to the end of that spell-binding word-picture, he raised the weapon and pointed it directly at the jury. The jury's eyes were fixed upon it in awed fascination, and then—as counsel spoke the words, 'and to her horror the thing went off', the weapon fell from his fingers with a clatter to the floor.

Little over an hour sufficed for the jury to reach their decision and, on their return, those of us ~~who knew~~ the ways of juries ~~felt~~ pretty certain what that verdict was. Had they taken longer, one might have concluded that it was a 'verdict of 'Guilty'', or a 'disagreement necessitating a new trial. But so speedy a verdict

indicated an acquittal. But of course one never knows. So it was a hushed court that awaited the formal announcement.

Madame Fahmy was led into the dock by two women prison officers. She clutched the ledge with trembling black-gloved hands. Her face was deathly pale, nor did she once look in the direction of those who held her fate in their hands.

Not until the strong resonant voice of the foreman of the jury announced the verdict of 'Not Guilty' did Madame Fahmy raise her eyes. Then for one fleeting moment she turned them towards the jury box and it seemed as though her lips framed the word, '*Merci*'. In a moment all drama was swept away as, from the people in that thronged court, there was an outburst of applause and cheers. Not since the acquittal of Robert Wood in 1907 had I witnessed such a scene.

Sternly the judge ordered the court to be cleared, and it seemed almost an anti-climax to have to wait while all those who had no duty in the court were ushered outside.

Again the clerk of the court put his question and once more the foreman of the jury returned the verdict 'Not Guilty'.

Through the interpreter Mr. Justice Swift told the still waiting woman that she had been found innocent, and then added quietly, 'Let her go'.

Tears ran down Madame Fahmy's cheeks and her features twitched with emotion. She looked as near to collapse as ever I have seen anyone. Yvonne Alibert, her sister, whom I had interviewed in France, was waving an excited hand in Madame Fahmy's direction and the latter smiled wanly back.

Outside in the main hall there were more scenes of excitement, women laughing and crying by turns. Outside in the street, crowds were cheering the verdict, men hurling their hats into the air with excitement.

I had no time to watch these events too closely. I was more concerned with getting away unnoticed as soon as I could, for the fun was now about to begin so far as I was concerned.

All along, as I have mentioned, I had kept in discreet contact with my friend Maître Assouard. Yet, although I attended that

trial daily, none of my rivals had a glimmer of an idea that I even knew him. I had agreed upon this with the lawyer, suggesting that whilst we were attending the court we would show no signs of recognition but pass as though we were strangers.

There were times, however, when we managed to exchange a whispered word or two.

The Old Bailey is not an easy place to watch. I know all the ways of entrance and exit, and I knew that arrangements had been made by Madame Fahmy's advisers to dodge the Pressmen as far as possible.

I knew that the eyes of other newspaper men would be on me, and, whilst I pretended to be as ignorant of what was happening as they were themselves, I had to keep an ever watchful eye on things to make certain that I was not 'left'.

Reporters were dodging here, there, and everywhere. First to this exit, then to the other. Every possible way by which she could leave the court was watched. Some papers had half a dozen men on the job, with cars in the vicinity to chase after her wherever she went. As far as I dared I went with the herd, to let them believe that I was as much in the dark as they were.

But already I had a taxi planted round the corner near St. Bartholomew's Hospital; already I had been tipped off that Madame Fahmy was to be taken to Prince's Hotel in Jermyn Street. But I had to see the others away first. Meanwhile, a surging cheering crowd was gathered outside the court. Half-way across the road was a private car.

Suddenly there was a burst of renewed cheering as a petite woman, accompanied by an olive-skinned man, came down the steps of the main entrance. She paused a moment to wave an excited hand to the crowd. Everyone thought it was Madame Fahmy herself. Pressmen dashed to the spot, and followed the party as they struggled through the mass of people to the private car. The woman and her companions clambered in and drove off.

~~This was my opportunity!~~

I slipped across to my taxi. 'Prince's Hotel, Jermyn Street,' I ordered, and in a flash we were off.

Meanwhile Madame Fahmy had been smuggled out from another door. I was already at the hotel when she arrived. She was hustled quickly through the lounge to an upstairs room on the first floor. In the rush I managed to whisper to Maître Assouard to get me to her as soon as possible. Madame Fahmy was in the company of an English friend who was looking after her interests.

The lawyer assured me that nobody else but myself would get near her. I was there some minutes before the first newspaper man appeared on the scene. It was a question of patient waiting, and seeing that I was not jumped even at this last minute. I knew that tempting offers would be made from other papers. In fact one man, a director of a great daily, was already on the scene with an open cheque ready to make an offer that might have been accepted were it not for my friend at court, who stalled him off.

I suggested to Maître Assouard that it would be a good thing if the clamouring newspaper men and photographers were refused an interview or photographs until Madame Fahmy had rested a little while, and composed herself.

The idea was accepted, and the friend who was looking after the little Frenchwoman came to the foot of the stairs to announce this decision.

Meanwhile I had smuggled one of our photographers up a staircase from the restaurant, and got him concealed behind one of two folding doors through which he could see into the room where Madame Fahmy was reclining on a settee, surrounded by her sister and friends. He was waiting his opportunity to take a flashlight photograph of the scene in the room when the door was opened.

I still kept well in the background, but when I saw Maître Assouard strolling down the staircase as though about to leave the hotel I sauntered to the outer steps and stood there. As he passed he whispered, 'Come along to the Bonnington in an hour's time.' The Bonnington was an hotel in Southampton Row where he was staying.

I went back to the lounge and ordered some tea. Then I got

through to my editor, who told me that I was on no account to *let up on the story*. Prices had already been mentioned by rivals, one of £800, and another of £1,000.

My editor said he would get in touch with the managing editor, who had left the office, and that I was to keep in constant touch with him.

I made my way to the Bonnington Hotel. I asked to see Maître Assouard. To my dismay he was not there. I waited, thinking he might have been delayed. An hour went by and I began to get a bit worried. So far the other reporters had gone off with the promise of interviews and pictures later.

I decided that I would ring up the Prince's Hotel, and see whether the lawyer was there. I was at once put through to Madame Fahmy's room, and to my relief the Maître answered the 'phone.

'Come along right away,' he told me, 'I had to return immediately I reached my hotel, and did not leave a message in case somebody else got it by mistake.'

I nipped into a taxi, and was at the hotel in a few minutes. The lawyer came down at once.

'A newspaper has rung up offering £1,500,' he told me, 'but I have told them that nothing can be done till to-morrow morning at ten o'clock.'

That was all I wanted. There began a chase by telephone to get hold of James Heddle, my managing editor. He was not at his private house, but, I was informed he might be at his club. By this time it was nine o'clock at night. I rang the club, only to find that he had left for a certain theatre where he had a box.

I got through to the theatre, because by this time I dare not leave the hotel for a minute, in case somebody came along and scooped me. I sent a message to my chief in the box, and he came to the telephone. I explained the position, that we had till ten o'clock the next morning to get the story.

'I'll come down right away,' he said, but I had discovered by this time that Madame Fahmy had gone to bed and was not to be disturbed till the morrow after her long and 'terrible ordeal. I

explained that there was no need for him to come that night, but it must be early the next morning.

'I'll be there by 8.30 sharp,' said Mr. Heddle. 'Meet me in the lounge at the hotel.'

I heaved a sigh of relief. That night I dozed on a settee in the lounge, one wakeful eye open in case anybody should happen along on the early side.

At 8.30 a.m.—prompt, my chief entered the hotel. I rang for Maître Assouard and made the necessary introduction. Within a matter of minutes a contract was signed and sealed. I had got my story!

The sum paid was £2,500. It is no breach of confidence at this date to mention that this was the first time that so large an amount of money was paid by any newspaper for a life story. Much larger sums have been paid since then, for, like the cost of living, the price of life stories has risen with the times.

I feel that this story would be incomplete without a postscript. What was Madame Fahmy like? What were her reactions to the terrible ordeal she had undergone?

Alas! I cannot tell you. I was not present at the signing of the contract. My job was to get the story and this I had done. And—another thing. I could not speak French and Madame Fahmy could speak no English. So Sydney Smith, a colleague on the Hulton group of newspapers, who could do both, was called in to do the actual writing of the story. Thus I did not even *see* Madame Fahmy after her acquittal. Sorry!

## 3

## *Light and Shade*

IF THE murder of Fahmy Bey and the trial of his lovely wife was the sort of story a crime reporter dreams about, there are others which prove a positive nightmare. He can't choose his jobs; he must take them as they come along. That is what makes his career so singularly fascinating. The thrill of the chase is ever with him. The excitement of getting at the guts of a story never ceases; and yet—his life is not all thrills and excitement.

In the November of 1929 I was tipped off that Sir Bernard Spilsbury was going to Great Fransham, Norfolk, to exhume the body of a Mrs. Rosalie Fox, who had died during a fire which broke out in a room she occupied at a Margate hotel. At the inquest a verdict of accidental death from suffocation was returned, and on 29th October, the body of the woman was buried in the little churchyard at Great Fransham.

When I heard that the great pathologist was about to carry out an exhumation I pricked up my ears. Exhumations are not an everyday occurrence, and are not ordered without good reason. The news tied up with another titbit of information which had come my way. I knew that Chief Inspector Ham-brook of Scotland Yard was making inquiries in the Margate and Great Fransham areas, and it did not take long to put two and two together and decide that there was something moving. Especially as only a few days before the Yard were called in, Sidney Fox, a son of the dead woman, who was staying at the same hotel when she ~~died~~ met her death, had been arrested at Norwich on a charge involving false pretences and fraud.

I caught the first train to Norwich and made my way to Great Fransham. Very soon all the crime men from the various news-

papers were on the scene. There was no sign of Sir Bernard Spilsbury, but a little reconnoitring in the neighbourhood of the cemetery, where I saw screens erected around a recently-dug grave, satisfied me that I had not been misled.

A blinding snowstorm raged, and as I made my little reconnaissance, my feet got colder and colder, and my fingers and ears seemed to be on the point of dropping off. I returned to the hotel and discussed with my pals a plan of campaign. Sir Bernard was supposed to be arriving that night, and it was rumoured that he would carry out his task in the early hours of the following morning. It was a case where nobody could 'scoop' the other, and in view of the weather we decided among ourselves that we would take it in turns to maintain an all-night vigil at a suitable point of vantage outside the churchyard. This we could do in the kindly shelter of a car. There were enough of us to do this in pairs at two-hourly intervals. It was also agreed between us that the moment there were any developments one of the twain on sentry-go would dash back in the car and inform those at the hotel so that they could rush to the scene of operations.

The first two on duty took a bottle of whisky to fortify them against the cold, and throughout the ensuing hours, as each relief couple embarked on their sentry-go further supplies of whisky were taken along. In those days it was only 12s. 6d. a bottle so that there was no question of squander-mania about our fight against the elements.

All through the night we watched and waited. Not a sign of Sir Bernard did we see, nor of any activity within that silent graveyard. At length one of the party drove up to tell us that the pathologist would not be arriving till 9 a.m. and the exhumation would not take place till 10 a.m.

Our cold and dreary vigil had proved unnecessary and we might just as well have slept warmly and comfortably in our beds.

The result of Spilsbury's post-mortem examination proved that Mrs. Fox had died from strangulation and not suffocation. The charges of fraud against Sidney Fox were dropped and that of matricide substituted. He was tried at Lewes Assizes in February,

1930, was found guilty and hanged. By means which it would be inadvisable to reveal, I was able to get the story of his life for publication under his own name. I also succeeded in obtaining letters written from the death cell, to a woman friend.

Another unforgettable experience was at the inquest on dear old Jimmy White of Daly's Theatre fame. I had known him over the years, this genial combination of theatrical and financial wizardry. Many is the time I have drunk champagne with him at Daly's on the first night of one or other of his musical shows. Sometimes I have seen him at his City office when seeking news of some big deal in which he has been engaged. So that it came as a great shock to me when the news came trickling into the office over the tape, that he had been found dead in bed at his lovely mansion, King Edward's Place at Foxhill, near Swindon. Especially when inquiries revealed that the circumstances surrounding his death pointed to suicide. The inquest was fixed to take place in Jimmy's own home—his beloved retreat from business worries—the Coroner's Court to be one of the spacious rooms at King Edward's Place.

Towards the end of June, 1927, his housekeeper, Miss Dora Dore, entered the bedroom of her master towards noon and found him lying on his bed clad in shirt and trousers but without collar or tie. She touched his forehead and found he was quite cold.

Held between the dead man's hands, near to his face, was a sponge which had been soaked in chloroform from a bottle on a bedside table. Dr. Robert Beatty, who performed a post-mortem examination, came to the conclusion that Jimmy White had died from chloroform poisoning. Dr. A. P. Macnamara, a doctor friend of the dead man, was present at the autopsy, and said that while White had died from chloroform he had also taken prussic acid. This was confirmed by a note left behind addressed to the doctor which read, 'Go easy with me old man. I am dead from prussic acid. No need to cut any deeper. Jimmy.' A typical crack of this great showman, even in death.

From my own knowledge of the man I can say that Jimmy was one of the best loved men in both the theatrical and business

worlds. It was with a sad heart then that I journeyed to Foxhill to attend the inquest on my friend. It seemed too as though the elements were also determined to weep at his passing; for, although it was midsummer, I found on arrival that the rain was simply teeming down. I made my way through the grounds leading to the mansion. I was amazed to find several of my colleagues from other papers, clustered together under the friendly branches of some trees. When they had started out from London it was fine, but by the time they reached Foxhill the rain was pelting down in torrents.

‘What about getting inside?’ I suggested as I saw them all bedraggled and getting wetter and wetter. They grinned!

‘We’re love locked out,’ said one. ‘We’ve already been up to the house, but the footman says he has been instructed not to let us in until the court is opened.’

The rain continued to beat its way through the leaves of the trees, and we were literally getting soaked. The water was pouring from the front corners of our jackets, and from the brims of the hats of those who wore them. I determined to make another effort to ‘get in out of the wet’ and ran across the lawn to knock at the door. The sound echoed through the stilled house, and it seemed a very long time before the door was opened by a footman.

‘Look—old man,’ I said courteously, ‘my colleagues and myself are getting drenched to the skin. Don’t you think you could find room for us inside until the inquest opens?’

‘I have been instructed that nobody is to be admitted until the court opens,’ was the uncompromising reply and the door was shut to with an air of obvious finality.

I don’t mind admitting that I felt angry. I don’t know who had given the instructions and I don’t care. I only know that Jimmy White, who, all his life had delighted in publicity and was ever the courteous friend of the newspaper man, would never have countenanced such unkindly treatment of those who were engaged on a legitimate job of work, even though it was connected with his own inquest.

Between us we decided that, taking it in turns and at intervals of two minutes, one of us would go up to the house and hammer on the door, and when it was opened gently inquire whether the court was open yet. One after another we carried out this programme and I think we won, for at length we were ushered into a sumptuously furnished room upon the floor of which was a rich carpet into which our muddy feet sunk. We draped ourselves over the chairs and settee with scant regard for the water which drained over the furniture from our clothes.

We did not let the matter rest there! One of our number voiced a protest against the courtesy by which we had been kept out in the heavy rain before the door was opened.

Nor were we in any way chastened by the reply of the Coroner who said, 'Can you tell me what right you have to come into a private person's house? The inquest is now being held and there was no inquest before I arrived.'

Which was all very true from a purely official point of view, but I still feel that our treatment on that occasion was utterly opposed to the spirit of the man upon whom the inquest was being held, and this incident has remained one of the most unpleasant memories in all my long years as a crime reporter.

On the other hand I have had some very amusing experiences. I was sauntering along by St. Martin's Church, Trafalgar Square, and had just crossed to the island on which the statue of Nurse Cavell stands when who should I run into but Chief Inspector Grosse of the Flying Squad.

'Just the man I wanted to see,' he said. He then told me that he was taking a 'bunch of the boys down to Epsom to break up a likely razor-slashing fight between two rival race gangs.'

'There might be some fun if you're down that way,' he said.

Just at that moment we were approached from the other side of the road by a man who was wearing an apron under his jacket. He sidled up to us, and then, furtively reaching into the bib of his apron, he produced an ornate looking fountain-pen.

'You can have it for five bob,' he muttered in a low voice looking round him all the time. 'I knocked it off on a moving job.'

'Up to the old lark again, Jack?' said Grosse taking the pen, and the man looked up into his face. I shall never forget his expression as he cried:—

'Gord 'struth Guv'nor! Eight million bleedin' people in London and I had to sort *you* out.'

Over a dozen similar pens were found upon him when searched, and for years Jack had practised the dodge, pretending to be a removal man who had 'knocked off' a valuable pen while engaged on the job. What is even more surprising perhaps is that he apparently had little difficulty in finding people ready to snap up such a 'bargain'.

I went down to Epsom as suggested and watched the Yard men drifting about among the crowds surrounding the bookies, but evidently the gang from the Midlands heard that something was afoot, for there was no outbreak of violence.

So it was that, day by day, I went out on this story or that. A murder here and a smash-and-grab raid there; with now and again an intriguing swindler turning up to add to the spice of life.

Neither the notorious Baron von Munchausen or the cobbler of Koepenick had anything on 'Major Leonard Crane, C.B.E.', in the matter of brazen effrontery or imagination, and the story of his legal fight for what became known as the 'Wenhamton Millions' is an epic of fantastic invention. His claim to the rank of major and the C.B.E. was as unwarranted as his story of the mythical millions was false.

That he was arrested while wheeling a greengrocer's barrow through a London street was somewhat of an anti-climax to his impudent pretensions; that he was unmasked by a clergyman on the very eve of what would have been a bigamous marriage was another ironic feature of his downfall. This last deception of the woman he had duped was the most cruel and shameful of his fraudulent exploits, as the late Mr. Justice Hawke remarked in sending him to four years' penal servitude at Ipswich Assizes in 1934. Said the learned judge: 'Perhaps the worst of the offences was that involving Mrs. Duke. It was a blackguardly thing to do.'

It was towards the end of January, 1934, I learned that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Major Leonard Crane for uttering a false affidavit at Southwold, Lincolnshire, and that the Major was missing from his usual haunts.

Scenting a story I journeyed to this picturesque little seaside town to make inquiries on the spot. I soon discovered that the forged affidavit was a document purporting to be signed by Lord Merrivale, President of the Divorce, Admiralty, and Probate Division of the High Court, making absolute a decree of divorce.

This document had been produced to the Rev. R. N. Pyke, vicar of Southwold, when Crane and Mrs. Duke, his bride-to-be, called upon him to arrange their marriage. Mrs. Duke was living apart from her husband, and when Crane proposed marriage to her, she explained that she was already married.

'That offers no difficulty at all,' breezily declared Crane. 'I'll get in touch with my friend Lord Merrivale. He will sign the necessary form giving you your immediate freedom.'

Sure enough within a few days he produced the document referred to apparently bearing the signature of his lordship together with that of a Mr. Bosanquet, K.C., described as 'counsel for Mrs. Duke.'

It was here that Crane slipped up! The astute vicar observed that this document was dated three months *after* Lord Merrivale had retired his Presidency of the Divorce Division, having been succeeded by Sir Boyd Merriman. The Rev. Pyke consulted his solicitors with the result that Crane, learning inquiries were afoot and with more discretion than valour, vanished from the scene.

That was only 'the beginning of my discoveries. I found that over a considerable period the ungallant major had been posing as a King's Messenger and a member of the Secret Service and that he had obtained thousands of pounds from his Southwold friends and others on the pretence that he was a co-plaintiff with the late King George V, in an "action against the National Provincial Bank in which a sum of over £800 million was involved.

As evidence of the truth of his story, and posing as a major in the 2nd King's Horse Guards, which regiment has never existed,

Crane produced sheaves of legal-looking documents stamped with the official embossed stamps of Somerset House and the Royal Courts of Justice.

These bore the signatures of such legal luminaries as Lord 'Sankey H.C.' (the H.C. according to Crane standing for High Chancellor) and Lord 'Hewart L.C.J.', the then Lord Chief Justice. Among the documents subsequently produced in court, was one signed 'Rex. R.I.', supposed to be the signature of His Majesty.

I saw and handled many of the documents long before Crane was arrested, and they would certainly appear convincing to anyone unused to legal documents.

There were also official paying-in slips of the Bank of England for varying amounts up to £20,000, purporting to be signed by various bank officials. One which I saw was apparently signed by Mr. B. G. Catterns, the chief cashier of the Bank at that time.

I compared this signature with that appearing on our Treasury notes and found that they were exactly alike. The 'B' and the 'G' ran into each other just as they did on the pound and ten-shilling notes in issue.

It was by such documents as these that Crane managed to impose on his victims. And the story of his title to the fabulous millions which he claimed was as detailed as were the hundreds of documents he produced.

The bank had dishonoured a cheque bearing his signature when there were in fact funds to meet it, he declared. He proposed to sue for damages and the bank had offered to settle for a few hundred pounds. He was determined to obtain thousands. The 'Crown', he added, anxious to be revenged on this particular bank for refusing to handle war loan—an allegation without a vestige of truth by the way—had come to his aid and set in motion the necessary legal machinery to support his claim. That was Crane's story and he stuck to it at great profit to himself.

As time went on the thousands of pounds grew into hundreds of thousands, and then into millions of pounds until the 'damages' he insisted were due to him, reached the astronomical figure

of £846 million. Both the King and the Crown had already drawn something like £150 million, said Crane, but owing to certain legal quibbles, the remaining amount had been placed in Chancery. Hence the grim fight in which he was engaged, and his need of money for legal fees, stamps and documents.

Not a very convincing story when looked at in the cold light of day perhaps, but, with the documents he produced it did not fail to register with those whom he proceeded to defraud, and who, even when it became known that Crane was on the run, *still* believed that in due course he would turn up and disburse the several sums of £500,000 apiece which he had promised to each of them in return for their financial support.

Nor was it *only* the documents upon which they relied, for Crane actually took his victims up to London on several occasions. On these outings they accompanied him to the Law Courts, Somerset House and the Bank of England. They saw him enter various rooms in these places and come out with imposing-looking documents duly stamped and bearing the signatures of the gentlemen I have mentioned as well as many others.

On one occasion Crane drove up to a house in London with one of his friends and boldly rang the bell.

The door was opened by someone who greeted the visitor effusively, greeting him with a loud and cheery, 'Hullo, Crane. Do you want that paper signed? Come in—come in.'

'Glad to see you again, Sankey,' replied the visitor as he entered the door. Shortly afterwards he came out holding another paper couched in impressive jargon, and bearing what purported to be the signature of Lord Sankey.

From the Bank of England he would emerge with formidable bundles of banknotes which he sometimes handed to his victim for 'safe keeping' until such time as he would want them. They little dreamed that this money was in fact derived from the amounts they had handed to Crane for 'investment' in his 'claim' and that this was simply another angle of the gigantic confidence trick he was playing upon them.

From time to time in order to bolster up his story Crane would

pretend to ring up Lord Sankey, Lord Hewart, or the Manager of the Bank of England, and hold long conversations over the 'phone, discussing the business of the millions. He certainly rang up the right telephone numbers of these people, and I can well imagine the surprise of the person at the receiving end as they listened to the unintelligible—to them—gabble of the resourceful Major, as he impressed his dupes.

All these things inspired confidence, and it was not until his actual arrest several months after his exposure, that the bubble of the 'Wenhamton Millions' was finally pricked, and his victims realised how they had been swindled.

Meanwhile I had been making inquiries into the history of the 'Major', and had unearthed a few illuminating facts about his career. I found that he had been fined in 1930 for larceny and embezzlement; that his real name was David Percy Caplice, and that he was a married man with two children. He had deserted his wife and family who were at this time chargeable to the London County Council.

How he came to assume the name of Crane is not without interest. He was right up against it at the time, when a woman met him in the street and fancied that she recognised him as her brother Leonard, who had been reported 'missing' during World War I. She greeted him fondly and Crane was not slow to realise his good fortune. He accepted his new identity and the woman took him to her home where she looked after him. From that time onward he became Leonard Crane. Still having a struggle to make ends meet he started on his frauds. They were small in the beginning, but as time went on his stories became more and more fantastic, and the documents he produced greater in number and more imposing.

I spent days collecting this information, and in interviewing those who had fallen for his story. James Clapham of Chalk Farm Road, was one of Crane's closest confidants. He was with him almost daily and accompanied Crane on nearly all his expeditions to Somerset House, the Law Courts, the Bank of England and other places; Oswald Spindler, a motor dealer of Wenhamton;

Edward Rawlings, of Blythburgh a few miles away; Mrs. Duke, who was housekeeping for Mr. Rawlings when Crane entered on the scene.

Mr. James Bird, who took over £200 from the funds of a society of which he was secretary to hand over to Crane, and was ultimately sent to prison for six months for fraudulent conversion, and a Mr. Ernest Fairhead of Romford.

They one and all admitted when I saw them, that they firmly believed the swindler's story; they parted with their money, and readily signed a document supposed to be binding under the 'O.S.A.' (Official Secrets Act) swearing that they would not divulge a word about the millions they were to share.

I could go on recounting the amazing exploits of this bogus major, but I have known too many glib-tongued impostors to be unduly impressed by Crane's efforts, and already there was looming before my eyes the story *behind* the story.

The question that intrigued me was *how* Crane was able to obtain the hundreds of documents apparently bearing out his claim which he produced to his victims stamped as they were with the authentic embossed stamps of the Royal Courts of Justice and Somerset House?

How was it that he could walk into room after room at either of these places, and come out with sheaves of stamped and signed documents?

I decided to find out and discovered how easy it was.

For example, the 'affidavit' making absolute the divorce of Mrs. Duke, and purporting to be signed by Lord Merrivale, was just one of the usual forms obtainable at any law stationers, and kept in stock in the offices of solicitors with a large divorce practice, all ready to be filled up by the parties concerned. The form simply declares that no action has been started by the King's Proctor, and that there is no impediment to making absolute a decree *nisi*. A bold forgery of a signature and the document could be filled in as desired. In the case of Mrs. Duke there had been no divorce proceedings, but Crane had filled in the form as though there had.

I made my way to the Law Courts in the Strand. I traversed

corridor after corridor and entered room after room all over the building without question or challenge. It was all quite simple. There were solicitor's and counsel's clerks bustling in and out, and one had only to walk in, produce any kind of document and study it, stay as long as one liked and then just march out again. Not once was I asked any question.

But what about the official *stamped* documents? I made my way to Room 6, which is the stamping room. I learned that stamps of certain amounts were required for affidavits while stamps of varying amounts were needed for other documents. Some of them were ordinary printed documents obtainable from any law stationer, but others were *just ordinary sheets of foolscap paper* bearing ordinary handwriting, or typed matter.

One just paid one's money over the counter and asked that these foolscap sheets should be stamped with the amount desired, and that was that. The documents were not read, they were just stamped. The whole business intrigued me, especially when I found that it was possible to hand in a sheet of *absolutely blank paper*, and get it stamped for any amount up to £1,000. I decided to test this for myself—but *not* for £1,000.

Purchasing two-pennyworth of plain foolscap paper from an adjacent stationers I scribbled upon one sheet the most ridiculous nonsense I could think of at the moment. This is what I wrote: 'In pursuance of affidavit 640,931 relating to the matters of the middle-weight boxing championship, I, Bernard O'Donnell, champion light-weight jockey of the world (12 st. 8 lb.) do undertake to pay into my bank the sum of forty-four million pounds by the forenoon of next century.'

I could have laid claim to the Throne of England and the ownership of Buckingham Palace just as easily, and if I had done this on parchment, carefully inscribed in proper legal jargon, it would have appeared a most convincing document to the lay mind.

But I was more modest and simply pushed forward the gibberish I had written and asked for a two-and-sixpenny stamp. Within three seconds the document was handed back to me with the requisite stamp duly impressed upon it.

It became clear that Crane could have entered the Law Courts, gone into one or other of the rooms there leaving his companions outside, prepare a document, if necessary forge a signature and then join his victims with yet another piece of 'official' evidence.

In order to perpetrate frauds on a stupendous scale it would be possible to issue a 'specially endorsed writ' against a purely fictitious person. Such a writ would have the official court seal upon it. The next procedure would be to swear an affidavit that the writ had been duly served. For this one would have to purchase what is called a 'judicature stamp'. The writ would then be taken to the filing office to be filed.

As the purely fictitious defendant could not 'enter an appearance', judgment would automatically be granted for the amount mentioned in the writ. Having obtained judgment one would have to buy another 'judicature stamp', after which one could leave the Law Courts armed with a document showing that one had obtained judgment against a person *who did not exist*, for perhaps thousands of pounds.

It was just as easy as that!

From the Law Courts I went to Somerset House, and here again I spent some hours wandering through various rooms dealing with mortgages, the floating of new companies and the transaction of every kind of legal business, without question or hindrance.

I determined to try the blank sheet of paper technique once more and asked one of the officials if he could put a five-shilling stamp on it.

'You can have stamps for any amount you like on a blank paper,' he told me, and so I came away with a document bearing the embossed heading of Somerset House and a five-shilling stamp, upon which I could have written any sort of fictitious claim.

Some of the documents produced by Crane bore very elaborate red wax seals. These would not be so easy to procure as they would only be stamped upon documents already written. There would, however, be very little difficulty in getting them on

documents which had been properly made out in the first place, and then, with the aid of a warm knife slipped under the seal, they could be removed and transferred to bogus documents.

One might imagine that his task at the Bank of England would be more difficult. Bear in mind he had produced paying-in slips showing fabulous amounts as having been paid in to his account there, all duly 'rubber stamped' and signed. To a man of Crane's effrontery this presented no obstacle.

I decided to try it for myself just as I had done at the Law Courts and Somerset House. I found that I was able to enter the Bank of England, stroll about its maze of corridors, go into its various departments, securities, etc., without hindrance, and take paying-in slips from the receptacles provided for the purpose. Armed with these—and the resource of the inventive Major—it would have been perfectly easy for me to make up a rubber stamp similar to that used by the Bank of England from a boy's printing set, and, after filling in whatever amount I fancied, trace the signature of Mr. Catterns or any other of the various signatures on our £1 and 10s. Treasury notes, ink it over carefully and produce the slip as evidence of my bona fides.

Of course it would be more convincing to those I was defrauding if I prepared such a slip overnight, then took my victims along with me to the Bank on the following day, and, after leaving them in one of the spacious halls to await my return, come back with the ink still wet upon the signed and stamped paying-in slip.

So you will see that it was comparatively easy for Crane to obtain any of the documents he produced in support of his story, and just as simple to pretend to have conversations with officials in certain rooms at his various places of call, and then walk out with some document. I did it repeatedly.

As regards the telephone conversations which so impressed the unhappy 'investors' in the 'Wenhamton Millions', what could be simpler than to ring up a number—the correct number too—and then ask to speak to Mr. Justice Blank, or the solicitor, or the manager of the Bank of England? Then, having 'got through'

engage in a glib conversation about the whole fictitious business, while the person at the other end is explaining that 'his lordship is at the courts', or that he knows nothing of the matter. One could go on asking questions or making replies which would sound most convincing to one's listeners.

When on the occasion that Crane appeared to call upon Lord Sankey, and was warmly invited into the house by the person who opened the door, it is obvious that the house was not that of his lordship, for Crane greeted the door-opener with a familiar 'Hullo, Sankey', in the most intimate fashion. In this instance he probably persuaded a confederate to help him in his swindling masquerade.

Well, that was the story behind the story as I unearthed it in the case of David Percy Caplice *alias* Major Leonard Crane. And long before the swindler's arrest, it was published to show the ease with which it was possible to obtain apparently irrefutable documents to bolster up the most preposterous claims. '

I was present at his trial when Crane pleaded guilty, the only defence urged on his behalf being that he 'was sorry', and that it 'seemed incredible that he should have been able to take in these people by such a series of nonsensical documents, like Alice in Wonderland'.

The learned judge did not take this view, however, and the enterprising 'Major' was sentenced to a well-deserved four years' penal servitude.

## *An Eleventh Hour Witness*

BUT FOR my production of an eleventh-hour witness at the inquest on Alfred Oliver, the Reading tobacconist, Philip Yale Drew, the American cowboy actor, might well have been sent for trial on a charge of murder.

That is what I meant when I remarked that a crime reporter might, in the course of his inquiries into a crime, bring to light certain facts leading to the prevention of some grave injustice. The Drew story is a case in point; for, by prevailing on this vital witness to give evidence, I was the means of shattering once and for all the strong suspicion which enfolded the actor like some close-fitting garment.

And believe me it *was* strong! The facts indicating that Philip Yale Drew was guilty of the brutal murder of the inoffensive tobacconist provide one of the most vivid examples in all my experience of how a perfectly innocent person can become enmeshed in the web of circumstantial evidence to such an extent that his very life may be put in jeopardy. It also shows how the most trifling incident may provide one of the strongest threads in that web.

It was Philip's partiality for calves' liver as a luncheon dish that fanned into flame the smouldering fire of suspicion against him, just as it was the simple act of sending his suit to be cleaned that led to his being interrogated by two Yard men and to his being put on the grill at the inquest upon Mr. Oliver.

A knowledge of the facts of the crime is necessary to appreciate how sinister was the evidence against Drew and how heavily the cards were stacked against him before, on the last day of the inquest, I brought forward the man who was able to blow

sky-high what I have always regarded as the 'case for the prosecution'; for that is what the Coroner's inquiry resolved itself into.

At 5.50 p.m. on Saturday, 22nd June, 1929, sixty-year-old Alfred Oliver, tobacconist of Cross Street, Reading, was in his shop when his wife came to the doorway of the little living-room to say she was going into the garden with the dog.

'Shan't be long, dear,' she told her husband, who smiled and gave a little wave of his hand before settling down to read a book, *A Day from London to Penzance*.

At 6.15 Mrs. Oliver returned to the shop to find her husband lying collapsed and dying behind the counter from which he had waved her a cheery farewell less than thirty minutes before.

It was a cruel and vicious crime! Mr. Oliver had been battered about the head with some heavy object. There were thirteen lacerated wounds on the top of his head. The stock cases behind the counter were splashed with blood. Money in notes to the amount of £10 or £12 had been taken from the till, but the silver remained untouched.

Theft was the obvious motive. The manner of the crime was also clear. The murderer had attacked the tobacconist, reached over the counter, snatched the notes and vanished.

When his wife came upon him, the dying man was slumped on the floor in a sitting position, bleeding profusely from his injuries. She called Mr. Taylor, a neighbouring tradesman, who at once summoned the police. Mr. Oliver was whisked off to the hospital where he died later from multiple fractures of the skull.

With commendable promptness Chief Constable Burrows of the Reading Police called in Scotland Yard, with the result that the burly, bearded figure of Chief-Inspector Berrett, one of the Yard's most experienced sleuths, accompanied by 'Detective-Sergeant Harris, appeared in Reading to assist the local police.

Together with other Pressmen I was already on the scene when the two Yard men arrived, and had already embarked on my own inquiries, interviewing tradesmen in the street and other people who had been in the locality at the time of the crime.

From what I gathered during those early inquiries, I formed the conclusion that the attack on Mr. Oliver was the work of one of the racing thugs who frequent Reading during Ascot racing week. A man who had probably had a bad day at the races, and who, in desperation, decided to do a quick 'in and out' job to recoup his losses.

That was my opinion then, and that is my opinion now. What is more, it is the view that was held and worked upon by the police for five weeks until, by one of those miracles of coincidence which make truth more strange than fiction, Philip Yale Drew entered the picture.

Every detail of the crime supported the view I had formed. The frenzied battering of Mr. Oliver; the snatching of the Treasury notes, and the rapid get-away. In addition, Saturday, the last day of Ascot week, was known in Reading as *Black Ascot Saturday*, because of the riff-raff who descend upon the town on that day and hold up publicans for free drinks on pain of smashing up their saloons.

This I learned while making a tour of the public houses trying to get a line on any bloodstained notes which might have been passed over the counter in the bars. The police made a similar check-up; and, drawing a blank in that direction embarked on a comb-out of all the lodging-houses and cafés in and around the town in the hope of landing upon some probable suspect. But all in vain!

One definite clue, however, did emerge! From my interviews with tradesmen and others I learned of a man who had been seen in Cross Street at various times of the day as well as at the time of the murder. He was an unkempt sort of individual, rather heavily built, wearing a blue or dark suit, hatless, and with a shock of dishevelled hair. He had attracted attention to himself by his peculiar behaviour. Now all the people I spoke to who had seen this man agreed with the above description of him.

Needless to say every effort was made to trace him. The police issued a description and asked for any information concerning such a man. They also requested any firm of cleaners to advise

them if a blue suit bearing any unusual stains was handed in to them for cleaning. They felt certain that the clothes of the murderer must be heavily stained with the blood of his victim. Every effort that human mind could conceive was strained to locate this man but without result.

The inquest was formally opened and adjourned for the police to pursue their inquiries. Five weeks went by! Those of us who were on the story had almost written it down as yet another of those unsolved crimes which happen from time to time. The murderer had got clean away with his paltry gains, but with the disquieting stain of murder indelibly imprinted on his soul.

Then, on 23rd July, Philip Yale Drew handed in to the Renovating Company at Wheelergate, Nottingham, a blue jacket and waistcoat for cleaning.

One of the side pockets of the jacket was found to be a bit sticky. The police were informed, and on 25th July, Detective Sergeant Harris of Scotland Yard, a shrewd and brilliant officer, called on Drew who was then appearing in a play called *The Monster* at the Palace Theatre, Trent Bridge. It was a thriller in which Drew played the part of a tramp detective. Harris told Drew that he was making inquiries into the death of Mr. Oliver; cautioned him, and took a long statement regarding the actor's movements on the day of the murder. The next day Sergeant Harris asked Drew to accompany him to the police station where he took another statement. Later on, on 7th August, Drew was again closely questioned, and yet another long and detailed statement was taken down and signed by him. Three statements within a fortnight, bear in mind.

There followed a series of amazing coincidences which plunged Drew into the full glare of unenviable publicity. Inquiries revealed that during the very week of the murder he was actually appearing in *The Monster* at the County Theatre, Reading. It was discovered that during this week he wore a blue suit—the jacket and waistcoat of which, but *not* the trousers, he had handed in for cleaning at Nottingham—and usually went about hatless. It was also noted that in almost every single detail, he answered to

the description of the stranger who had been seen in the vicinity of Oliver's shop round about the time of the crime.

Now as it happened, I had known Philip Yale Drew for years. Back in 1919 or 1920 when he was starring as *Young Buffalo* in Western thrillers at the Lyceum Theatre, London, I had written a story about him and met him on several occasions since that time.

Knowing him, it was inconceivable to me that this rugged, gentle actor, almost child-like in his simplicity, could possibly be guilty of such a wanton and vicious crime as the killing of Alfred Oliver. So when I heard that he had been interrogated by the police and that things certainly looked a bit sticky, I went to see him. He was then appearing at St. Albans, still in *The Monster* with his friends Mr. and Mrs. Frank Lindo, who ran the show.

‘Well, you old scamp,’ I greeted him, ‘what do you mean by having your clothes cleaned?’

His deep-set humorous eyes crinkled into a grin.

‘You know how it is, Bernard,’ he drawled in his unmistakable cowboy accent. ‘The grease paint oozes from the pores of your skin and gets all round the collar of your jacket making it mucky, and you just have to get it cleaned some time.’

A fact which any actor will endorse. Remember that the murder took place in June and it was in July, the hottest season of the year, that he handed in his jacket and vest for cleaning. His make-up in the part he played was a particularly heavy one.

We talked things over. He told me what had happened between him and the police. The questions he had been asked and the answers he had given. How they had been particularly anxious to know whether he was in the habit of buying calves' liver in the towns he visited. He agreed that he was. He liked it and whenever he could get it, he bought some.

The significance of this question lay in the fact that a Mr. George Loxton, a butcher's assistant of Cross Street, had identified Drew as a man who entered his shop round about 1.30 p.m. on the day of the murder, hatless and wearing a blue suit. This man, according to Mr. Loxton, had asked him whether he had any

calves' liver and then walked out of the shop without waiting for an answer. I had interviewed Mr. Loxton during my early inquiries and been impressed with the graphic description he gave me of the stranger whom he saw *twice* during that day. It certainly fitted in with the appearance of Philip, although I did not realise it at the time.

When I journeyed to St. Albans to see Philip, I did not know that some *five weeks after the crime* Mr. Loxton had been taken to Nottingham with a Mrs. James for the purpose of identifying the man he had seen in Cross Street on that fatal 22nd June. Nor was I aware that while stationed at the corner of a street there, he had unhesitatingly identified Drew as that man.

As regards Mrs. James, I knew that she had described a man whom she saw in the doorway of Mr. Oliver's shop 'wiping blood from his face'. But I did not know that she too had ~~also~~ identified Philip as he walked along that Nottingham street on his way to the theatre.

It was Philip who told me of this double identification, and I realised the unhappy position he was in when he explained how, while on the stage, he felt that people were whispering, 'That's the man the police questioned about the Reading murder. I wonder . . .'

For this reason I suggested that he should let me publish a story under his own name telling the public all that had taken place so that they would know the true position so far as he was concerned. He readily agreed.

On 8th September then, there appeared exclusively in my paper, the *Empire News*, a signed article by Philip under the heading, 'What I Told the Police'. It was the frank and detailed story of a man with nothing to hide.

Meanwhile the police were very properly carrying on intensive inquiries. They found a Miss King at the house where Drew lodged at Maidstone where *The Monster* company was appearing following its week in Reading. She described how she had seen the actor cleaning his jacket with benzine in the garden. On the 'face of it yet another suspicious factor in the chain of evidence.

In addition both Mr. and Mrs. Lindo who ran the company and were close friends of Drew, could not help but admit that during their week in Reading, the actor had taken far more strong drink than was good for him. But—they were as certain as I was that Philip Yale Drew could never have committed so vicious a crime as the battering to death of Mr. Oliver.

You will observe how every little detail appeared to fit in like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle, directing the finger of suspicion towards the actor.

Everybody I had spoken to during my inquiries on the spot immediately after the murder emphasised the peculiar behaviour of the mystery man seen in Cross Street on the day of the murder, as though he were under the influence of drink.

I doubt if in the investigation of any crime the police ever had a stronger chain of circumstantial evidence against any suspect than ~~they had~~ against Drew. They were in possession of all the information I have set down above together with a number of other damning facts. They had too the three statements which Drew had readily given them. But, although I am certain they were absolutely convinced that he was the murderer, *Drew was not arrested*. I could not understand why at the time, but was soon to learn.

The authorities decided instead to re-open the adjourned inquest. A decision which was destined to arouse an outcry such as seldom has been heard in connection with this very ancient court of law. There was a furore of public protest against what one barrister who wrote to the Press termed 'turning Coroners' Courts into legal torture chambers by methods of inquiry which the police are not permitted to use.'

But let us get back to the inquest itself. From the moment the curtain was rung up on this drama of life and death with Philip Yale Drew as the leading actor, sensation followed sensation.

In all, some sixty witnesses were called. They were honest and truthful witnesses whose testimony was unquestionable as regards what they believed they saw and heard. I mention this to emphasise how strong was the evidence against my friend Philip.

Mr. Loxton, for example, not only identified Philip as the man who had entered his shop asking for calves' liver, but he also identified him as the same man whom he saw going towards the dead man's shop about 6 o'clock on the night of the crime.

He saw him *twice* bear in mind, and note the detailed description he gave of him. 'He was wearing a blue serge suit and *brown* boots,' he told that tensely silent, crowded court. 'I remembered him because of his strange behaviour and because he had a *pronounced accent*. He might have been a Scotsman or an Irishman, but he certainly was not English,' declared the witness.

'He might have been an American,' suggested the Coroner and Loxton agreed.

I want you particularly to remember the *brown boots* and the *marked accent*. They are important.

Asked whether he could see anyone in court who resembled ~~this~~ man, the witness at once pointed to Drew who was ~~sitting~~ in court, in a front seat, and who was unmistakable.

The evidence of Mrs. Alice James was even more startling. She identified Drew as the man she had seen at 6.10 p.m. standing in the doorway of Oliver's shop 'wiping blood from his face'. He was dressed in a *dark* suit, was wearing no hat, and 'had a lot of rough hair', she said, adding, 'I thought he had been fighting.'

Mrs. Shepherd was another witness who gave vital evidence. She was looking in Mr. Loxton's shop at 6.12 p.m., she stated, when she saw a man dash out of Oliver's shop and run very fast towards Friar Street where he turned left. He was wearing a blue suit. She only saw his back, so could *not* identify Drew.

Friar Street is the street in which the County Theatre stands where Drew was appearing during the week of the murder. The times mentioned by all three witnesses are about the time that he would normally be making his way to the theatre to start his heavy make-up for the first house performance which opened at 6.50 p.m. The times mentioned by the three witnesses referred to show that the murder must have been committed before 6.10 p.m.

There were other witnesses who were in Cross Street on that tragic Saturday, and with only two exceptions, *they all*—six in



Reginald Ivor Hinks



The villa where Hinks murdered Mr. Pullen.



*Above: 'The blazing car'.*

*Below: Helen Campbell leaving Bedford Prison after her last interview with  
Arthur Rouse: the author is on the right.*

number—identified Philip as the man they had seen behaving in an eccentric manner.

One can hardly fail to appreciate how damning and apparently unanswerable was this evidence given solemnly on oath. Evidence which established beyond all shadow of doubt that whoever murdered Alfred Oliver bore a most striking resemblance to Philip Yale Drew, was wearing a blue suit—like Drew—and went about hatless and had a shock of hair *also* like Drew.

At the end of the second day of the inquest when witness after witness had identified Drew as the man they had seen in the vicinity of Oliver's shop round about the time of the murder, the danger in which the actor stood was borne in upon me. Not that the identifications—other than those of Mr. Loxton and Mrs. James—were of any great evidential value, because unlike the procedure in police and assize courts, all the witnesses were present in court throughout the hearing and actually *saw* Philip identified by other witnesses before they were called upon to give evidence.

During Mr. Loxton's evidence for example the Coroner ordered Drew to stand up in court, and then asked the witness, 'You are sure this is the man?' Loxton assented. So that those who followed him into the witness-box could not help but identify the actor when the Coroner asked them whether they 'recognised anybody in court' as being the person they saw.

There was another potent reason why Philip should be easily identified. The people of Reading had so taken him to their hearts that his daily journeys to and from the court were more in the nature of a triumphal procession.

Crowds waited outside his hotel to catch a glimpse of him and sent in their autograph books for him to sign.

I have never in all my long experience witnessed such scenes. Men and women pressed forward to grip his hand and wish him luck. Some of them handed him little bits of coal. Others gave him miniature black cats and sprigs of white heather. *His photograph appeared in all the daily newspapers up and down the country.* So that he was well known. Hence I realised that the identifications

were practically worthless from an evidential point of view. *Except of course* those uninspired identifications of Mr. Loxton and Mrs. James who both picked him out at Nottingham long before it was known that any suspicion was attached to him.

At the same time I realised that the evidence so far called was black against him, although I was still certain that he could not have done this terrible thing. I was with Philip all through his long ordeal. I stayed at the same hotel, and daily accompanied him to the court through the cheering crowds. After that ominous evidence on the first two days, however, I felt constrained to say to him over dinner, 'I think you ought to be legally represented, old man.'

'What on earth for, Bernard?' he replied. 'I haven't done anything.'

'I know you haven't,' I said, 'but the police think you ~~have~~, and they are going all out to prove it.'

Reluctantly Philip agreed that I should engage a solicitor on his behalf, and I saw Mr. F. J. Ratcliffe of Reading. Some little time before, I watched a young barrister, Mr. Fearnley Whittingstall of London, cross-examining expert witnesses in a suspected poisoning case, and had been greatly impressed by the shrewd way he handled them. I asked Mr. Ratcliffe to engage him on behalf of Drew, and on the third day, this young counsel appeared in court.

We can now return to the inquest proceedings, for apart from those witnesses I have already mentioned there were others. And once more I would impress upon you the vital importance of the times so far mentioned.

Mr. Loxton had said he saw Drew going towards Oliver's shop about 6 p.m. Mrs. James said she saw him standing in the doorway of the shop at 6.12 p.m. and fixed the time by saying that she noticed the Town Hall clock registered 6.10 p.m. when she passed by on her way to Cross Street.

Mrs. Shepherd who saw a man (unidentified) running from Oliver's shop at 6.12 p.m. fixed the time by the clock in Mr. Loxton's shop. She was looking in the window at the time.

I want now to turn to other witnesses who undoubtedly and indisputably *did* see Drew on that fatal Saturday. First of all Mrs. Mary Goodall of Kingsmeadow Road, with whom Drew lodged during his week in Reading. She described how he was a late riser in the mornings and *did not leave the house till 11 a.m. on Saturday, 22nd June, the day of the murder.* He returned about 3 p.m., she stated, but left the house later and did not come back till about 5.15 p.m. when he sat with the witness and had tea with her. Drew left the house about 6.10 p.m. said Mrs. Goodall, but too much reliance cannot be placed on these times because, as she told the court, the clocks in her house 'were not very accurate'.

When he left the house he was wearing his brown overcoat—the same overcoat he wore throughout the inquest proceedings—*thrown over his shoulders like a cape*, said the witness.

Fortunately the time mentioned by Mrs. Goodall was corroborated by another witness, Mrs. Elizabeth Crouch, also living in Kingsmeadow Road, only a few doors away from where Drew lodged. She said that when walking home with her husband that Saturday evening, she passed the Town Hall clock and observed that it was *between 6.5 and 6.10 p.m.* It would take a few minutes to reach Kingsmeadow Road, and she then stopped to talk to a neighbour. As she was doing so she saw Drew rush from the house 'as if he had not a minute to live', and dash along the street. *He was wearing an overcoat over his shoulders like a cape.*

A Mrs. Winifred Greenwood living in the same road, gave similar evidence about the *overcoat being worn like a cape* but could not be certain of the time.

Mrs. Florence Wheeler, another witness, said she was shopping in Cheapside on the Saturday *shortly after 6 p.m.* and then made her way towards home in Kingsmeadow Road. She went down Station Road and turned into Belgrave Street. As she did so she nearly collided with a man—whom she identified as Drew—who was wearing a dark suit, and a brown overcoat '*over both shoulders like a cape*'. She had seen this same man the day before in Kingsmeadow Road *wearing his coat in the same way.* To get from

Cheapside to the point where she met him would take her '*somewhere about a quarter of an hour. Certainly not less than ten minutes. The man was walking very quickly*'.

It was after hearing this evidence that I became absolutely convinced that Philip Yale Drew had nothing to do with the murder of Mr. Oliver.

In the first place the verified times given by the witnesses I have just quoted show that it was a physical impossibility for Philip to have been in Cross Street at the time the tobacconist was murdered. Every one of these witnesses—and two others besides whom I have not dealt with—describe Philip as *wearing an overcoat flung over his shoulders like a cape*.

There was *no mention of any overcoat* in the evidence of either Mr. Loxton, Mrs. James or Mrs. Shepherd, you will recall. They all concentrated on the blue or dark suit the man was wearing. The man they saw was *not* wearing an overcoat, so that it must be obvious that the murderer *without* an overcoat could not have been Philip *with* an overcoat.

There were other facts which to my mind were equally conclusive that Drew was not the murderer. The motive was clearly robbery. The snatching of the bundle of notes proved this.

Drew was in regular employment and had been with 'The Monster company for a year or more. He was drawing a regular salary; his needs were few and his tastes simple. He had two banking accounts both in funds, and if he had needed money he could have obtained an advance of whatever amount he wanted from Mr. Lindo. So there was no need for him to commit a brutal crime to obtain a few pounds.

I have mentioned there was an outcry against the manner in which the inquest was conducted, and you may wonder why. In the first place the Coroner put questions which were utterly outside the acknowledged rules of evidence that govern an ordinary trial. Let me say at once that he was perfectly entitled to do so, for a Coroner is a law unto himself in this respect. He can make his own rules of evidence, and the ordinary rules so strictly applied in other courts of law do not obtain.

The police also made suggestions and implications they would never dare to have made in any other court, and it was against these things that the protests were uttered. For example, during the evidence of Detective-Sergeant Harris, the witness stated that Drew's hair 'was not quite the colour' it was when he interviewed him at Nottingham. 'It was greyer when I saw him than now, and when the inquest started it was browner than it is now . . . *The dye is going off now*'.

The italics are mine. These words contained an underlying suggestion that Drew had dyed his hair for the purpose of effecting some sort of disguise. There could be no other explanation of including such a statement in his evidence and it is one that would never have been allowed in any other court of law.

That afternoon when the Court rose I took Drew to a Reading barber who was experienced in the dyeing of hair, and got him to make a minute examination.

'That hair has never been dyed,' he affirmed after a most careful scrutiny, and on the following day Mr. Whittingstall during his cross-examination of Harris challenged him.

'Are you aware that Mr. Drew is prepared for any chemist whom the police like to choose to come and examine it?' he asked.

'I give evidence of what I see, I don't know anything about that,' was the reply.

The detective also referred to the article under Drew's name which appeared in the *Empire News* denying that he ever asked Philip any question as to whether he had carried any calves' liver home in the pocket of his jacket.

'Who makes that explanation?' asked the Coroner.

'Mr. Drew apparently as the author of the article.'

'A scientific explanation. Possibly well thought out and considered,' commented the Coroner.

This led to another question concerning the pair of blue trousers belonging to the jacket and waistcoat which Philip had handed in for cleaning at Nottingham. These had been found at the theatre at St. Albans, and had *not* been cleaned at Nottingham. There was

and still is, a cleaner's green cleaning tab on the top in the side lining,' Harris told the court.

'Have you traced the cleaner?' asked the Coroner, and when told that this had not been done, he went on, 'Will the Press, on our behalf appeal throughout the country to any cleaners who will help in this matter of identification and find where those trousers were cleaned?' He continued: 'Probably new pockets were inserted. *The pockets appear to have been renovated with ordinary buff pocket material. . . . This is very urgent.*'

Observe the underlying suggestion which would never have been made in any other court of law, but which was perfectly permissible in the Coroner's court without evidence in support.

'Once more Mr. Whittingstall stepped into the breach.

'Mr. Drew instructs me that these trousers were twice cleaned and he will help the police by telling them that they were cleaned at Rochdale and Swansea,' he said.

But the Coroner was not satisfied. 'What we want to know is the last date of cleaning and the last place of cleaning,' he said, hinting that this information had not been vouchsafed.

He soon received that information, however, for in answer to the Press appeal, it transpired that the trousers had been cleaned by Messrs. Martin of Leeds on 12th May, 1929, *five weeks before the murder of Mr. Oliver* and *no new pockets had been inserted.*

It was this sort of thing that aroused such disquiet in the minds of the public.

At length all the witnesses on behalf of the police were called, and Mr. Whittingstall intimated that Drew desired to go into the witness box to tell his own story.

I would point out that there was no need for him to submit himself to this ordeal, and I shall never forget the stir in court as he made his way to the witness-box. The Coroner very properly warned him that he need not give evidence unless he so desired and then pointed out that anything he did say would be taken down and might be used in evidence at any subsequent proceedings. He then asked Drew whether he quite understood.

\*Philip stood there, an impressive figure with his mane of crisp

wavy hair. He smiled back at the Coroner as he took the Bible in his hand, and in a quiet but resonant voice which could be plainly heard throughout the court, replied, 'I only understand that I am going to speak the truth and the whole truth.'

He had already made three separate statements to the police. He had also made the statement to me which had been published in the *Empire News*. He now made another statement, *and in no single instance did it vary one iota from those he had made previously*. He was closely questioned by the Coroner, but his story remained unshaken throughout.

There was still one thing that perturbed me greatly. At the very outset of my inquiries—long before Philip appeared in the picture—I had interviewed a Mr. Alfred Wells. He was a butcher's assistant employed at a shop on the opposite side of the street to that of the dead man's premises in Cross Street. I was with H. Winton de Wigley of the *Daily News*, as it was then. It is now the *News Chronicle*. So that we both heard what Mr. Wells had to say and this recollection remained quite clearly in my mind at the time of the inquest.

Wells had seen the stranger with the unkempt hair on 'two or three occasions' on the day of the murder. The first time was at 7.30 a.m. when he was having breakfast at the *Welcome Café* in Cross Street. Drew was in bed at this time. As he sat there, said Wells, a man entered. He was wearing a blue suit and *brown shoes*. You will recall that Mr. Loxton described the man he saw 'going towards' Oliver's shop about 6 p.m. on the night of the murder as wearing *brown shoes*. But Mr. Wells noticed something else.

'They were worn down at the heels,' he told me, a fact which says much for his powers of observation.

'He asked me the way to the lavatory and I directed him,' Mr. Wells continued, 'and I noticed that he spoke with a pronounced *Tyneside accent*.' He saw the same man again in Cross Street later in the day, the last time being about 5.40 p.m.

Now here was a man whose evidence to my mind was of vital importance in the matter of identification for two reasons.

First he had seen the man on more than one occasion, and had spoken to him. He had a firm recollection of the man, and was emphatic that he spoke with a Tyneside accent. Mr. Wells was well qualified to judge of this for himself, for as he told me at the time, 'I'm a Tyneside man myself.'

Now there was no mistaking the accent of Philip. He spoke with a round unmistakable American burr, which could by no stretch of imagination be confused with Scotch or Tyneside, especially by a native of the latter area.

Within two hours of the murder Wells had gone to the police and made a voluntary statement giving a full description of the man he had seen. Not just a fleeting glance, but a close-up view. Yet—he had not been called and I could not understand why. Nor had he been taken to Nottingham as had Mr. Loxton and Mrs. James to see if he could help identify the man he had seen.

When therefore I realised there was no intention of calling this witness, I talked it over with Winton de Wigley, who was as puzzled as myself over this matter.

As a result of that conversation I decided to seek out Wells again. So early the next morning, before breakfast, I went to his shop. It was the last day of the inquest. At least we thought it would be.

I reminded him of the previous occasion on which I had seen him and then said: 'You have seen the pictures of Philip Yale Drew I suppose.' He nodded.

'Are they pictures of the man you saw in Cross Street on the day Mr. Oliver was murdered?'

He was very careful in his answer.

'I couldn't say for certain off-hand, but I don't think so,' he replied. 'It's so difficult to tell from a photograph. There is a certain resemblance but I would be absolutely sure if I heard him speak. You see I'm a Tyneside man and he had a Tyneside accent.'

'Will you come along to the hotel and see Drew?' I asked and Mr. Wells, good fellow that he was, at once agreed. He tucked his blue-striped butcher's smock into his waistband, and accompanied me to the hotel.

Philip was talking to the Lindos and I pointed him out.

Mr. Wells shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'That isn't the man I saw. *He* had a mop of hair, and it was very untidy. *That* hair (Drew's) could never get dishevelled. It's too crisp and wavy.'

I took him across to Philip!

'Meet a friend of mine,' I said. Philip turned and smiled. 'Any friend of Bernard's is a friend of mine,' he said in his rich American burr.

Wells turned to me. 'Good Lord no—that's not the man I spoke to,' he said emphatically. 'There's no Tyneside accent about that voice.'

'Would you be prepared to swear that on oath?' I asked him, and once more without hesitation the young butcher replied; 'Certainly I would.'

I rushed him round to the office of Mr. Ratcliffe where he swore an affidavit which he signed.

Before going to the court that morning Mr. Ratcliffe and Mr. Fearnley Whittingstall together with Drew, had a conference at which the statement of Wells was discussed.

Then, at the appropriate moment, the young barrister asked leave to call my eleventh-hour witness.

There was an excited stir as he entered the court, every eye being turned in his direction. He took the oath and repeated the story which he had told to the police *four months previously*.

In reply to questions by Mr. Fearnley Whittingstall he emphasised the point about the accent. 'He had the same Tyneside accent as myself,' he said, '*only more of a twang*.'

Counsel turned towards Drew.

'Stand up Mr. Drew,' he said, and Philip rose to his feet and faced the witness. For a few breathless seconds Wells regarded the actor. And then, 'Sit down Mr. Drew. You are not the man.'

A buzz of excitement ran through the court as Philip resumed his seat and Mr. Whittingstall went on.

'You were so impressed by seeing this man that you went to the police?'

'I did, voluntarily.'

The Coroner broke in at this point, 'And they did not think much of your statement obviously or they would have called you.' To which Wells retorted, 'They did not seem to be very sharp.'

There followed a scene such as I have never before witnessed. The Coroner solemnly warned Wells against the danger of committing perjury and suggested he had never made a statement to the police. The witness declared that he had.

Both the Chief Constable of Reading and Chief Inspector Berrett were busy looking through the sheaf of documents before them. They told the Coroner that they had seen no such statement, and if it had been made it would be with the papers in their possession. Once again the Coroner warned the witness against committing perjury. Wells was not perturbed.

He seized the Bible again and, holding it aloft cried, 'I swear by Almighty God.' He then recalled a little incident which had happened that very morning.

'When I came into court this morning,' he said, 'I saw at the door the sergeant who took down the statement I made.'

The sergeant was called, but explained that he had taken down so many statements that night, he did not recall that of Wells. But the latter leaned over towards the officer.

'Do you remember that when you were taking it down, a man came in and told you that he had just seen a woman who said she knew who the murderer was and you sent out two detectives to try and find him?'

Mr. Wells' memory was correct and the sergeant *did* remember the incident; and, what was perhaps no less strange, at that precise moment the original statement which Wells had made to the police was miraculously discovered among the very papers which had been so unsuccessfully looked through a few minutes before.

It was handed up to the Coroner and almost word for word, it was identical with the story Wells told in the witness-box and that which he had told to me on the night of the murder.

It was such incidents as these that created so strong a feeling of disquiet in the public mind as to cause leading articles to appear

in the national daily newspapers, while eminent lawyers voiced their condemnation of 'the archaic and somewhat arbitrary procedure' of our Coroners' courts.

In a trenchant article in the *Daily Mail* of 10th October, 1929, an 'eminent criminal lawyer' wrote, 'It is no exaggeration to say that these methods (methods of inquiry which the police are not permitted to use) threaten to undermine the base upon which the rights of citizenship are founded' and then went on to refer to the 'many cases still fresh in the public mind (that) will emphasise the ordeal through which innocent persons may have to go on account of suspicion.' Doubtless he had in mind the case of Mrs. Beatrice Pace, who only a year before had been sent for trial on a Coroner's warrant only to be triumphantly acquitted at her trial.\*

The writer concluded by saying, 'The Coroners . . . constitute themselves both judge and prosecuting counsel. They are privileged to make suggestions which no judge would permit.'

In other words *Trial by Inquest*.

Mr. Arthur Emmanuel, himself Coroner at Southampton, was even more outspoken. In a letter to the Press he declared: 'I do not think a Coroner's Court should be expected to start a prosecution which should be carried out by another authority. You do not want two trials . . . An adverse verdict against any person by a Coroner's jury must affect his ultimate trial and should always be avoided.'

In fact, so great was the outcry against the manner in which the Reading inquest was conducted that Mr. J. L. Martin, the Reading Coroner, was constrained to reply to the criticisms. After mentioning that he had never before received any complaint all through the eighteen years he had been a Coroner, he stated, 'I am against the practice of naming an individual. In the case I have just completed, *I resumed the inquest at the express wish of Scotland Yard.*'

The italics are mine! I have no grouse against the police going all out to bring a murderer to justice. Especially for such a cowardly and brutal murder as this. But, as Mr. Harry Allan, a Manchester barrister, stated at the time, 'The Coroner obtains

his information from the police, and if that information has not warranted the police in preferring a charge against a suspected person, it is a strange anomaly that this can be done as the result of a Coroner's inquest.'

Needless to say the last-minute intervention of Mr. Wells must have removed any doubts that might have existed in the minds of the jury who returned an open verdict. That is, a verdict which records that the victim into whose death they are inquiring was 'murdered by some person or persons unknown'. A right and proper verdict in the circumstances, for that poor Alfred Oliver was murdered there could be no shadow of doubt.

That their verdict was a popular one was evident from the moment of its being announced. At once there was an outburst of clapping and cheering in court which was taken up by thousands of people who thronged the street outside. Philip told me afterwards that he had only noticed one thing when the jury returned —the boots of the foreman of the jury with rather wide welts. That was the only impression he carried away of that dramatic moment which could so easily have meant his being arrested and sent for trial on the Coroner's warrant on a charge of wilful murder.

As it was, he walked out of that court to be greeted with the wildest enthusiasm by the clamouring crowds outside. We literally had to fight our way back to the hotel, with people, men and women alike, shaking Philip by the hand and crying, 'God bless you'. Manœuvring through the mass of surging humanity we at length got inside, but still the crowd clamoured for Philip.

Scrambling through a window on to a small balcony the actor made a little speech expressing his gratitude for the 'glorious sympathy extended' to him. And I who saw much of him after his ordeal can vouch for the fact that he never forgot those kindly demonstrations of the people of Reading.

## *'The Masked Medium' Spoof*

MOST PEOPLE, I suppose, will remember Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as the creator of Sherlock Holmes, if not as a devout believer in Spiritualism, to which faith he gave his services and his fortune with unstinting hand.

I remember him best as a fighter of lost causes; a knight ready to tilt against injustice of any kind. I knew him well for many years. I worked with him in the campaign he waged to secure compensation for George Edalji, a young Parsee solicitor who had been sentenced to seven years' penal servitude in connection with 'The Great Wyrley Cattle Maiming Outrages', as they became known. Conan Doyle, firmly convinced of Edalji's innocence, flung himself into the fray to get redress for this miscarriage of justice, with the result that Edalji was released from Staffordshire Gaol and granted a 'free pardon' after serving only three years of his sentence. In setting to work to prove this man's innocence, Conan Doyle followed the processes of mind of his world-famed detective, bringing his deductions to a successful climax.

The offence for which George Edalji went to gaol was one of the most revoltingly cruel in the annals of crime. Night after night a mysterious fiend stole into the fields around the sombre mining area of Walsall at dead of night, and ripped up helpless horses, cows, and sheep, leaving them to bleed to death. Night after night this ghostly killer carried on his maiming and slaying of beasts in spite of the vigilance of a small army of police and volunteer citizens who patrolled the area. At the same time a spate of anonymous letters flooded the neighbourhood accusing this person and that of being the culprit. In one of these letters the name of George Edalji was mentioned. He was arrested, tried, convicted and sent to prison.

While serving his sentence, Edalji wrote a story protesting his innocence and analysing the weaknesses of the case against him. By some means this story was smuggled out of prison and published in *The Umpire*, a Manchester Sunday paper. It was a propitious publication from the prisoner's point of view, for his story caught the eye of Conan Doyle, then at the very zenith of his fame as the author of the Sherlock Holmes masterpieces. It made such an impression upon him that he determined to test the facts for himself. Space will not permit me to describe his investigations, but the result was that Sir Arthur—through the columns of *The Umpire*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *Truth*—created such a stir that very soon all England was ringing with the wrongs of George Edalji. A storm of indignation swept the country, pressure was brought to bear on the authorities, and Edalji was given his liberty. By way of official endorsement of his innocence he was also granted a free pardon. But he was not given any compensation for those three years spent among criminals of every type.

It has always remained a pleasing thought that the paper on which I was crime reporter for over a quarter of a century (in fact until my retirement from the whirligig of crime in 1947) played an important part with Conan Doyle, in obtaining the freedom of Edalji. *The Umpire* became the *Empire News* in 1916 and I joined it on my return from World War I in 1918.

In the meantime one or two attempts had been made to get compensation for this greatly-wronged man but without success. The war over, I interviewed Conan Doyle and together we embarked on yet another attempt to gain financial redress for Edalji. Articles were published in the *Empire News*; we got members of Parliament to raise the matter in the House and I even got Edalji himself to make a plea through our columns, but all to no avail.

A few months ago, at the time of writing, I sat in a little back room of a London apartment-house a hundred yards from King's Cross railway station, chatting with George Edalji. To-day, in his seventies, he ekes out an all too modest living swearing

affidavits. His name still figures proudly in the Law List, for he was restored to the Rolls after his innocence was proved.

Conan Doyle and I were also engaged in fighting for the release of Oscar Slater. Slater was kept in prison for eighteen years for a murder he did not commit before the great author and others, including myself through the medium of the *Empire News*, were successful in obtaining his release. Of course the *Empire News* got the exclusive story of Slater's life in prison, and a most intriguing story it was. He was more fortunate than Edalji, however, for he was awarded £6,000 by way of compensation.

You will gather then that I was well acquainted with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and co-operated with him on more than one occasion. It was under rather different circumstances that I met him following my discharge from the Army through wounds in 1918.

I was just sauntering past the London Pavilion one day when I happened on a very old friend, the late P. T. Selbit, the most amazing and amusing stage illusionist I have ever known.

We drifted into the Café Monico, Piccadilly, for a drink and a chat; over a couple of double Scotch's, 'P.T.' remarked with a twinkle in his eye, raising his glass, 'Bernard, I am about to raise a spirit of even greater interest than this in the very near future.'

'Impossible,' I muttered with feeling, and then waited for him to go on.

'You know the *Sunday Express*?'

'I have heard of it,' I said.

'Well—the editor is offering £500 to any medium who can produce a spirit form under strict test conditions imposed by its own appointed committee.' Selbit went on.

'So what?' I inquired.

He took another sip of spirit.

'Then,' 'I've accepted the challenge,' he said. 'And I'm producing a medium who will do just that; "materialise" a spirit form, among other phenomena.'

'Genuine stuff?' I asked, for I knew Selbit's aptitude for showmanship. He shrugged his shoulders.

'Come along and see for yourself,' was all he said.

That is how I came to be in on what I have always regarded as one of the most daring and flagrant 'spoofs' ever perpetrated in connection with a supposed spiritualistic séance.

I have always been interested in spiritualism and have attended many séances; but I have never yet seen any phenomena or received any message of an evidential nature. I had known P. T. Selbit for years, and recalled how, a long time before, he had exposed the Thompsons, two Welsh mediums who created a sensation at the old *Alhambra* by 'materialising' bunches of flowers and cockatoos twice nightly on the stage.

One night they excelled themselves by materialising a *joint of meat*, weighing 6 lb. 7 oz.

This was a bit much for Selbit who, knowing that the mediums were staying in Bloomsbury, made a tour of all the butchers' shops in the neighbourhood. After a prolonged search he found one that had sent a joint of beef of that exact weight to the address at which the Thompsons lived, on the very day that the joint was materialised on the *Alhambra* stage. Selbit got signed particulars from the butcher, and then made his way to the late W. T. Stead, the famous spiritualist. He laid the whole facts before him. The latter was not in the least perturbed. He went to great pains to explain that it would have been easy for the mediums to dematerialise a joint from the butcher's shop and then materialise it later, but this would have put the butcher at a loss. So the honest Thompsons had *bought* the joint, dematerialised it in their own home, and later materialised it upon the stage.

I had also been 'in' on one or two other entertaining stunts of the resourceful illusionist, as for example when he took over a Y.M.C.A. building in Peter Street, Manchester, and turned it into the *Elite Kinema Gallery* for the purpose of showing the film *Sixty Years a Queen*, this being the story of Queen Victoria.

It so happened that about that time there was a competition being held at Belle Vue Gardens, to discover the 'loudest-voiced man in the world'. When the ear-splitting winner was proclaimed, Selbit promptly engaged him, and, hiring a landau paraded him

up and down the streets of Manchester, seated opposite to one of his assistants wearing a ludicrous top hat. The hat wearer had to pretend that he was stone deaf. He held an ear-trumpet to his ear, while the 'loudest voiced' merchant, armed with a huge megaphone bellowed into his 'deaf' companion's ear, 'You *must* visit the *Elite Kinema* to-night . . . You *must* see that magnificent historic film, *Sixty Years a Queen*.'

At which the other man would cup his ear with a hand, and beg the loud-voiced man to shout still louder because he could not hear.

Up and down Market Street drove the landau, stopping every now and again for this pantomime to be enacted, crowds thronging round to listen to the leather-lunged fellow harangué them on the thrills they would behold at Selbit's cinema.

On another occasion Selbit hypnotised a girl, had her placed in a bed which was prominently displayed in the window of a big furnishing store at Peckham, attracting considerable attention. Each evening, she was carried out on a stretcher, an attendant preceding her with a banner on which was inscribed: 'Come to the Public Hall and see the trance sleeper awakened.'

From this you will gather that there was nothing lacking in showmanship where Selbit was concerned. And it was showmanship plus a perverse sense of humour which prompted him to stage the séance that took place on 21st March, 1919, in Selbit's own flat in Bloomsbury. The séance room was situated on the third floor, its four windows looking out on to the square where stands the *Princes' Theatre*, Shaftesbury Avenue.

It was a long wide room, one end of which had been heavily draped with black curtains. Into this room were ushered the members of a committee of investigation appointed by the editor of the *Sunday Express*.

Chief among them was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Then came Lady Glenconner, afterwards the wife of Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Sir Henry Lunn, Dr. Wynn Westcott, the well-known coroner and expert on things occult, Dr. Edwin Smith, lecturer in Forensic Medicine at St. Thomas' Hospital, Superintendent

Thomas of Scotland Yard, Mr. Stuart Cumberland, an authority on thought transference, Mr. David Gow, Editor of *Light*, the spiritualist journal, and Mr. Ralph Shirley, Editor of the *Occult Review*.

In addition there was Sydney A. Moseley, the well-known author, representing the *Sunday Express*, while among other guests were Herbert Brennon, American film producer, Marie Doro, the lovely film star of silent days, and myself.

Before ever the medium was introduced, the committee made an exhaustive search of the room, lifting up the carpets to see there were no trapdoors or other trick apparatus. They examined the walls and the windows, tested the floor for electric wires, and made sure that the lighting arrangements were not rigged in any way to produce ghostly phenomena.

Mr. Selbit of course was there, looking as sardonic as ever, and with true showman instinct making his visitors feel that they were at liberty to impose the sternest of conditions in order to ensure there should be no trickery.

He produced a small black cigar-box to which a lock was attached. This he handed to the investigators to examine thoroughly. They did so! He next produced a small silk bag which was likewise examined.

The visitors were then invited to place any articles connected with either the living or the dead, into the bag which reposed in the box, what time Selbit impressed upon them to observe closely that the box was *never out of their sight*.

It was then that he introduced the medium. He opened the door of the room and there entered a slender young woman clad in white evening dress which stood out in strong contrast to the black hair and gleaming dark eyes which gazed out at the assembly over a yashmak.

She was shown to a seat at the curtained end of the room, and Selbit placed the box upon her knees. The lights were dimmed. At the request of the committee the illusionist took a seat at the opposite end of the room as far away from the medium as possible.

In a few moments there was the sound of a cough and a sigh

followed by a little moaning, and then the medium began to speak. Amidst pauses as though groping for the right words, she mentioned first a surname, and then a Christian name. It turned out to be the name of a member of the staff of the newspaper who had been sent along with a sealed letter which was a special test devised by the editor of the paper.

But the masked medium had much more to say about this test letter.

'I see machinery—cotton mills—something suggesting machinery,' she went on, 'cotton mills in the North—Yorkshire. They are at Halifax . . . I see words . . . German words . . . but they are not real German . . . only German in a jocular mood. I see the word *Ober-intellect* . . .'

You will note the amount of detail in the revelations of the medium concerning a letter which she had never seen. A letter which it *was* afterwards revealed was enclosed first in a thick blue cover, which was then placed in an envelope sealed with wax, and then stamped with a private device.

But perhaps her most remarkable performance, for it *was* that as you will presently see, was her deciphering of the cryptic message in the letter which in fact read:

'Liebe Ober-intellect, Ich habe until January 10 ein extension gewangelt!'

This was a faithful and sensational rendering of the exact words in the letter, and a most convincing proof of mediumistic phenomena. Or so it seemed.

Having thus gained the confidence of the committee, the Masked Medium, as she became known, simply went on from success to success. She described a medal which had belonged to the dead son of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Stuart Cumberland agreed with her description of a bit of a broken stud which he had dropped into the bag. Dr. Wynn Westcott deposited a strange medallion bearing the insignia of the occult society of which he was the President. This was a symbol containing triangles with his initials W.W.W. interlaced with the letters Q.S.N. The medium described this object with uncanny precision.

The visiting card of Mr. Gow she mentioned as 'something from someone concerned with spiritualism', describing the card and giving his name.

She appeared to experience some difficulty with one object, and it is a tribute to her showmanship that her failure to give a detailed description was even more convincing than if she had been completely successful.

'I see a swan . . .' she said hesitantly, 'I see something black . . . yes a swan . . . it is something to do with correspondence. I am sorry. I cannot tell you any more.'

In fact it was a black *Swan fountain pen*, and the owner of it was absolutely convinced of her psychic powers.

How did she do it? How could she possibly know what was contained in the box?

You will remember that just before Selbit introduced the medium he drew attention to the fact that the box *'never left their sight'*. He then opened the door and the medium, wearing a mask in the form of a yashmak, entered the room. Every eye was naturally turned upon *her* and in that moment, Selbit 'switched' the box which he held, to an assistant behind the door, receiving in its place a duplicate box, which the medium subsequently held in her lap. It was done so quickly and with such dexterity that nobody noticed the exchange. I was as completely fooled as the others although I was on the look out for the conjurer's usual 'misdirection'.

The real box was taken to a room where it was unlocked with a duplicate key, and where a wireless installation had been set up. The mask of the medium concealed two tiny ear pieces acting as a receiving set. Meanwhile assistants were making notes of the articles in the box which had been opened with a 'duplicate key'. They unsealed the test letter by means of a hot knife to melt the wax, and copied word for word its contents; they also prepared descriptions of the various articles which had been placed in the box.

This, I should imagine, was the first time that wireless telephony had been used to deputise for spirits. The transmission of the

messages was made by means of a large induction coil, the man in charge of this part of the show literally *telling* the medium what to say. While she was reeling off the various descriptions given, the 'back room boys' were resealing the letter and replacing the articles in the box ready for a 'switch' back at the appropriate moment.

This came when the medium said she felt tired and would like to rest for a few minutes. Selbit suggested that Lady Glenconner should retire with the medium and carry out a search of her person in accordance with the terms of the test.

Just across the passage was a small room. A maid held the door open, and the medium with a polite 'After your Ladyship', ushered Lady Glenconner into the room, the maid seizing this moment to change the box carried by the medium for the original box containing the objects she had just described.

At once the medium handed this box to Lady Glenconner asking her to retain possession of it so that she could assure the committee that it had not been changed. Then throwing aside her yashmak mask—and thus cunningly discarding her receiving set—she submitted to the search. Of course nothing suggesting trickery was found upon her. It was as simple as that!

But the séance was not yet over. There was to be a 'materialising' test, and once more the medium, now minus ear-pieces which had been adroitly whisked away by the maid when readjusting the mask, took her seat. Those present indulged in a little hymn singing to encourage favourable conditions.

Very soon in the shadowy darkness there appeared to come from the side of the medium a sort of vapoury figure bearing some resemblance to the human form. It grew and grew, and the silence was intense as it took a roughly human shape and then gradually disappeared.

For a few moments the room remained in darkness to allow the medium to come out of her trance, and then the light was turned on.

This phenomenon was as daringly produced as had been the previous psychometric demonstration. For the purpose of the

'materialisation' Selbit engaged an acrobat—none other than the 'deaf' man of Manchester who rode with the loud-voiced man you will recall—who, when the room had been sufficiently darkened, slipped out of a window in the next door flat, and crept along a narrow coping to a window at the curtained end of the séance room where the medium was sitting. He was clad from head to foot in black tights. Under cover of the hymn singing, he gently raised the window, stole in behind the black curtains and made his way to the side of the medium. Once there, from a pocket concealed in the front of his tights, he produced some phosphorescent butter muslin which he gradually formed into something resembling a human form. Having produced his 'ghost' he made the muslin vanish into his pocket and made his way back to the next door flat via the windows through which he had entered the séance room.

How convincing this séance must have been may be gathered from the fact that Sydney Moseley wrote a book on it titled *An Amazing Séance*. Lady Glenconner in writing a comment on the demonstration declared, 'The medium possesses remarkable powers, and deserves, and has, our gratitude for placing them before our circle of investigators in so generous a manner.' Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a bit sceptical of the ghostly apparition but expressed his firm belief in the clairvoyant manifestations. The *Sunday Express* too published a long and laudatory screed upon the 'Masked Medium's' demonstration.

Selbit said nothing, but thought a lot. He refused to accept the £500 offered by the *Sunday Express*, realising that if he did so it would savour of obtaining money by false pretences.

When, however, he was approached by several city men to give public performances of a similar nature, he agreed to do so and in due course appeared with his now famous 'Masked Medium' at the Victoria Hall, Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly.

And there he met his Waterloo.

Incidentally so did I, for I had arranged with Selbit that, later on, when he felt that the moment was ripe for disclosing that the whole manifestations had been produced by trickery, I should

have the story exclusively. Selbit's object in carrying out his 'spoof' was to show that the physical manifestations of the séance room, purporting to be produced by spirits could be produced by trickery, and that scientific investigators were not the best people to pass judgment on the genuineness of spiritualistic phenomena.

Of course it would have been an intriguing story when, as I put it, 'the moment was ripe'. Unfortunately for me it became overripe.

At the Victoria Hall the objects to be described were collected in little bags which were then dropped through a hole in the top of a box standing on a sheet of plate glass on the stage. 'To prevent any trickery,' Selbit explained. The box was then attached to two cords hanging from the flies and drawn up so that it hung in mid-air in full view of the audience. On this occasion you will notice there was no substitution of the box as before, but the same means was used to obtain knowledge of the contents, this knowledge also being conveyed by wireless telephony as at the séance in Selbit's flat.

As the objects were dropped into the box at the Victoria Hall, an assistant reached up through a trapdoor in the stage, and putting his hand through a cunningly concealed trap in the back of the box, withdrew the various articles from it.

The real difficulty came when the bags had to be returned to the box after they had been duly described.

To achieve this, when the box was lowered from the flies it descended into the arms of an assistant gorgeously attired in the roomy black knee-breeches so beloved of illusionists on the stage. The concealed trap door in the box reached to just about his waistline.

Having completed the examination of the contents of the bags so that the medium could give her description, while they were still—apparently—in the box suspended in mid-air, they were tucked into the waistband of the assistant deputed to hold the box at the conclusion of the séance.

It was then Selbit's job to reach through the hole in the top of

the box, grope through the trapdoor near the waist of his confederate, and withdraw one by one the bags containing the objects from their place of concealment. Actually it would appear as though they were being produced from the box which had never been out of sight of the audience.

Unfortunately for him, instead of getting hold of a bag he seized the top of the man's trousers and tugged. He told me later that it seemed as though those bags were glued to his assistant's body for, in spite of giving several more tugs he couldn't get the bag away.

Suddenly there came a disconcerting cry from a member of the audience.

‘You’re pulling his trousers off,’ someone shouted, and sure enough, when Selbit looked down he realised that he had tugged so hard that one leg of his assistant’s trousers had been pulled up to such an extent that a large expanse of white leg was showing.

The Masked Medium ‘spoof’ was over. And so was my story. The exposure was already complete.

## *A Dream Comes True*

THE STORY behind the story of the 'Masked Medium' was a 'scoop' I did not get, but I'd like to tell you of an occasion when the dream of every reporter's career came true.

How does one get a 'scoop', you may ask.

Bless your dear hearts, there is no high road to achieving this ambition, nor any cut and dried formula. One may go out on a story and spend every waking hour in trying to get something the other fellows have not got, and end up by being beaten at the post by the other chap who simply stumbled on to it by accident. Or—you may just walk round the corner and have it fall into your lap.

I've had it both ways and I know; and, speaking from my own experience I would say that luck plays a 75 per cent part in bringing off a 'scoop', the other 25 per cent being made up of application to the job with a modicum of low cunning.

It was a combination of all three which enabled me to get one of the biggest 'scoops' of my career in connection with a crime which might well have turned out to be the 'perfect murder'. It was one of the most callous and premeditated murders I have ever come across. The victim was an old man of 81, infirm of body and enfeebled in mind, who was slain by his son-in-law, so that he could enjoy the small fortune which he knew his wife would inherit from her father.

The crime was staged with such infinite cunning that it might well have passed for suicide but for the astuteness of Superintendent Tom Ashworth of the Bath Police who knew something of the old man's mental condition, and could not conceive him being capable of planning his own death with such detailed subtlety as had been displayed.

His suspicions were aroused, and subsequent inquiries soon convinced him that the son-in-law had murdered his wife's father for gain.

It was during the evening of 1st December, 1933, that a man frantically rang up the Bath Fire Brigade, stating there had been an accident, and asking that an ambulance be sent at once to 'Wallasey', Englishcombe Lane. This was the residence of James Pullen, who lived there with his daughter Constance and her husband Reginald Ivor Hinks.

Within four minutes, the ambulance men were bending over the body of old Mr. Pullen, lying on the floor of the kitchen at the address given, about a foot away from the open door of a gas oven.

Hinks was standing by and said, 'He's gassed himself'. But there was only the slightest smell of gas in the room, and none at all attached to two overcoats which, according to Hinks, he had found draped over the gas stove, when he discovered the tragedy. Mr. Pullen's head and shoulders, he declared, were inside the oven, and on finding him thus he had seized the old gentleman by the ankles and dragged him out.

'You may find a bruise at the back of his head,' he volunteered, 'for I heard his head bump when I pulled him out.'

A bruise *was* found, and it was very largely upon the evidence concerning this bruise that Hinks went to the gallows.

Like most would-be perpetrators of the 'perfect crime', Hinks had overlooked one or two small, yet vital details and rather over-staged the suicide scene.

Let us try and get a picture of the last few hours in the life of old Mr. Pullen. On that December night, Hinks sent his wife to the cinema, offering to stay in and look after her five-year-old girl by a former marriage. He sat in the sitting-room with Mr. Pullen, his ears strained to catch the least sound that might come from the little girl upstairs.

About 7.10 p.m.—according to Hinks' own story—the old gentleman tottered out into the kitchen on his way to an outside lavatory. He used the lavatory: Hinks remained in the sitting-

room until 7.35 p.m. when he heard the little girl call out upstairs, and he went into the kitchen to get her a drink of water.

In the kitchen, declared Hinks, he found Mr. Pullen *lying on his back* with head and shoulders in the gas oven. The door was covered with two overcoats completely hiding the upper part of the old man, and making a very efficient gas-chamber.

On the face of it an obvious suicide! But let us analyse a little closer these and other surrounding circumstances.

I have mentioned that old Mr. Pullen was mentally enfeebled; so much so that only a few weeks before, he had been found half-dressed, in a tram miles away from his home, wearing carpet slippers. He had tendered four matchsticks and a button for his fare to Dorking. On another occasion he had been found wandering, and taken home in a police car. That is how Superintendent Tom Ashworth knew all about the old man's mental weakness.

You will remember also that Hinks was in the sitting-room *listening for* any cry from the child upstairs. Yet he failed to hear the inevitable clatter the old man must have made removing the metal shelves from the oven, and stacking them up against the wall of the kitchen. Hinks did not hear his father-in-law moving about in the kitchen or any sound of his opening the oven door, taking the overcoats from their pegs, draping them over the oven door, removing coat and waistcoat and then sliding himself into the oven on his *back*.

This is a most difficult movement to achieve, as you will discover if you try. According to Hinks he heard nothing of what must have gone on in the next room, until the cry of the child from upstairs, stirring in her sleep, broke the silence of the night, and he went to get her a drink of water.

These were the points that struck Tom Ashworth when Hinks was telling his story. He could not for the life of him imagine how this doddering old man with the enfeebled mind could, within the space of twenty-five minutes, have made all the necessary arrangements for his suicide, so methodically, silently and successfully. His suspicions were confirmed when the post-mortem examination proved that the bruise at the back of Mr.

Pullen's head *must* have been inflicted *before* the old man entered the gas oven. The blood in the rest of the body was stained by carbon monoxide, whereas the blood in the bruise was not.

This meant that the bruise was caused by a blow on the head—sufficiently heavy to render him senseless, medical witnesses declared—*before* Mr. Pullen entered the oven and that he could not, therefore, have placed himself there.

Of course it quickly came to our knowledge that there was something fishy about the death of old man Pullen, and reporters were soon down on the scene making their own inquiries.

The inquest was fixed, and it was on that opening day of the inquest that luck began to smile on me. Hinks was present in court and gave evidence of identification of his father-in-law. The moment I set eyes on him I felt sure I had seen him before. I could not think where, or under what circumstances. I only had that strange feeling, 'Your face is familiar—now where have I seen you before?' I thought back to the people I knew who might have borne a resemblance to the man giving evidence, but could not place him.

Nor was it only his appearance that seemed to ring a bell. There was something familiar about his voice and gestures; his way of standing and the brisk turn of his head.

The inquest was only formal, and was adjourned for a fortnight, and it was during that fortnight that I got on to something that brought about my 'scoop'.

On returning home after the inquest, I looked up the newspaper cuttings in my own private library. I went to file 'H' to see whether I had got anything under the name of Hinks. I drew a blank! The feeling still persisted however that I had seen him before. I felt impelled to take a trip to Bath, and have a chat with him, to see if another meeting might awaken some memory and provide me with a clue to follow up.

As soon as my car pulled up outside the villa, an upstairs window was flung up and an irate face glared out at me. It was Hinks. He was obviously in a flaming rage. He shook his fists

and threatened what he would do to me if I dared enter the garden.

In a flash it came to me where I had seen him before. There came to my mind the picture of a little second-hand shop in Lambeth which I had visited just over ten years previously. I had gone there to see a man who was being questioned by an old Yard friend of mine, Superintendent Carlin, in connection with the death of a woman with whom he had lived. The shop was kept by a kindly old man whom this man called his 'London daddy'.

The woman's dismembered body was discovered wrapped up in bed clothes and sheets of paper, in the bedroom of a house in York Road, Waterloo, of which she was the landlady.

It was found following the discovery of a letter that had been pushed through the letterbox of the house, and which, when opened, read: 'To all whom it may concern—you will find my wife in the ~~house~~. But before you read these lines I shall be in the river.'

The letter was signed with the initials, 'R.I.P.' At first the police thought that it meant 'Rest in Peace', but Carlin and Divisional Detective-Inspector Charles Cooper soon discovered that they were the initials of a young and dashing young man who had been the lover of the murdered woman, a Mrs. Mabel Edmunds, who was living apart from her husband. She was a woman of fifty, while her lover, *Reginald Ivor Percival*, who meantime had vanished, was still in his early twenties.

While the inquiries into this 1923 murder were at their height, I ran Reginald Ivor Percival to earth at the second-hand shop of his 'London daddy', and began to question him regarding his association with the dead woman. Suddenly he flew into a rage and indulged in the fist shaking episode which recalled him to my mind when he repeated similar violent gestures on the occasion of my visit to the villa in Bath after the death of Mr. Pullen.

Yes! there was no mistake about it, Hinks and Percival were one and the same man. The two Christian names, Reginald Ivor, appeared conclusive. He had adopted the name of Percival while engaged in his affair with Mrs. Edmunds. He was *not* her murderer,

however, for a nephew named Frederick Jesse was eventually arrested and hanged for the crime. It was the latter who tried to incriminate Hinks of whom he was jealous, by writing the letter signed 'R.I.P.' which was pushed through the letter-box, and which had led to my first meeting with the man who was now suspected in another case of murder.

Leaving Bath, after linking these two incidents together, I went at once to see Hinks' 'London daddy', and learned that after the Edmunds tragedy, Hinks had beguiled another elderly woman into living with him for some seven years, during which time he robbed her, right and left, and spent every penny of a legacy which had been left her.

I sought out this unhappy woman, and from her own lips heard the full story of her 'seven years' hell', as she put it, with the man she had trusted. It so happened that when I saw this poor soul, she mentioned that the police had been to see her about her former lover, and had asked her if she knew about a certain lady holding an important position in Bath whom Hinks had also swindled. She had not, but her innocent remark sent me racing back to Bath where I managed to locate the lady in question and learned how Hinks had prevailed upon her to lend him money to buy a cycle and side-car. Later on he told her that the combination had been stolen. This was untrue for she found that he had cleverly staged the 'theft' in order to obtain the insurance money, and had gone off to London where, she heard, he had been paying court to a pretty widow in Kensington.

By means of a little subtle investigation I located the Kensington widow, a charming lady who would probably have become the wife of Hinks had not her guardian angel been watching over her. During her brief friendship with him she stood bail when he was charged with stealing a cycle, and afterwards provided him with money to spend the Christmas of 1932 with friends in Bath.

It turned out to be a good investment as far as she was concerned, for she was never to see him again until he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey on a charge of murder.

While he was away, he wrote loving letters to her in which he

told her of his yearning to make her his wife. She showed me some of the letters, and later on gave me permission to publish a few of them.

Gradually the letters from her absent lover became fewer in number, though by no means less passionate. In one he enclosed a card announcing:

The Hinks Electric Cleaning Service,  
Milton Avenue, Bath.  
'Phone: 5061

Thinking she would give him a pleasant surprise, the Kensington lady rang him up at the number mentioned.

It was *she* who got the surprise, for in answer to her request to speak to Mr. Hinks, she was told, 'Mr. Hinks is out with his wife.'

She wrote ~~axing~~ him with his perfidy, but Hinks blandly replied making no excuses for his deceit, simply asking her to let him have anything he had left at her flat, and wishing her 'health and happiness'.

What had happened was this. On 6th March, 1933, he met a Mrs. Jeffries, the daughter of James Pullen. She was a widow with one little girl. The moment that Hinks knew this lady would inherit her aged father's property, he paid violent court to her with the result that twelve days after their first meeting Mrs. Jeffries and Hinks became man and wife.

You know the sequel! Mr. Pullen came to his untimely end on 1st December and on the 19th of that month the adjourned inquest was resumed.

It was there shown that Hinks had fiddled several deals in connection with Mr. Pullen's property, much to his own advantage. At the appropriate moment he entered the witness-box where he flaunted himself as though he were the star in some sensational film. When, having told his story, he returned to the body of the court, he took a seat on the wooden bench right next to me.

A few feet away sat Superintendent Tom Ashworth. It was 7.30 p.m. when the jury retired on the last day of the inquest,

and after a few minutes Hinks turned to me—he evidently did not recognise me—remarking: 'I shall have to be going soon. I've got a couple of pet marmosets to feed at home. Do you think they'd excuse me?'

'I should wait till the jury return,' I replied feeling pretty certain that there would be no home-going for Reginald Ivor Hinks.

Sure enough, after an absence of twenty-one minutes, the jury returned with a verdict of 'Wilful murder' against the man at my side.

Superintendent Ashworth sidled along the bench and touched Hinks on the arm, at the same time uttering the formal words of caution and arrest.

'What a shame,' ejaculated Hinks, as he was escorted to the cells below before being whisked off to await the police court proceedings and his subsequent trial at the Old Bailey, with which we are not concerned here beyond mentioning that on Saturday morning 10th March, 1934, Hinks was sentenced to death for the murder of James Pullen.

In the *Empire News* of the following day I came out with the full story of his life and loves.

There were several other women, besides those I have mentioned, and I had obtained the stories of them all. No other newspaper had a single line of his wanton career or of the women he had deceived so cruelly. So great was the demand for the paper that thousands of extra copies were sent down by special cars to Bath, where people were offering sixpence a copy in order to read the story of Hinks.

And, what was perhaps the greatest tribute of all, on the Sunday following that on which my story appeared in the *Empire News* another national Sunday newspaper paid me the compliment of publishing almost word for word a paraphrased version of Hinks's exploits as written by me, for circulation in its early edition which is sent overseas.

This is an example of how the 75 per cent luck which I mentioned in opening this chapter, played a part in enabling me to land a 'scoop'. If I had *not* met Reginald Ivor Hinks before—as



Reginald Ivor Percival—and if he had *not* shaken his fist at me on the occasion of my visit to Bath, I might never have connected the two murders in my mind. In which case I should have missed a perfectly good story. As it was I was able to follow one line of inquiry after another until I had obtained a complete and coherent story of Hinks's Don Juan activities—activities which were destined to lead him to the scaffold.

The arrest of Hinks was not the only dramatic arrest on a capital charge at which I was present. One case which stands out in my memory as the most poignant of all such dramas was the arrest of 'The Tragic Widow of Coleford' as she became known; a little woman with whom I became on terms of closest friendship throughout the grim ordeal of her trial for murder.

## *A Dramatic Arrest*

BENEATH a little mound of earth in the peaceful churchyard of Clearwell just outside Coleford, Gloucestershire, lies the body of a humble sheep farmer around whose death from arsenical poisoning was woven one of the most sensational dramas ever staged in this country.

The man was Harry Pace, but the central figure in the drama was Mrs. Beatrice Pace, his pretty blue-eyed wife, who was called upon to stand in the dock at Gloucester Assizes charged with the wilful murder of her husband.

I was sitting in my office one day in January, 1928, when a brief message came over the tapes stating that the funeral of Harry Pace had been stopped by the Coroner on the representations of Elton Pace, a brother of the dead man. No other details were given. It was this message that sent me scurrying off to Coleford to seek out the story behind this incident.

It was late evening when I arrived at Coleford, situated on the fringe of the Forest of Dean. Mrs. Pace, I learned, lived at Fetterhill, a remote spot some three miles from Coleford. I hired a car and in the bleak darkness of that January night set off to find her. The small drab cottage in which she lived with her family was off the roadway, and I had to stumble my way down a little track running alongside a quarry. The cottage itself seemed to hang on the very lip of the hill from which the village took its name, overlooking the rugged valley and its lovely wild forest, pitted here and there with one-man coal mines.

Dorothy Pace, the eldest daughter, came to the gate in answer to my knocking, and Rover, a spaniel, gave me an interrogatory sniff as I made my way up the path to the house. The door opened

straight into a living-room where Mrs. Pace lay on a sofa just inside, and behind the door. In her arms was baby Jean, then only six months old.

Such was my first meeting with Mrs. Pace and the beginning of my friendship with her and the children as well as with her brothers and other relatives living in the district. That night, in the dim light of an oil lamp, I learned something of her story..

She was only a young girl of seventeen when Harry Pace, a headstrong masterful youngster, captured her affections and took her from her home to marry her in secret. A strange honeymoon theirs, for when she returned to the home of her brother Fred Martin and proudly displayed her wedding ring to his wife, saying that she had been married that day at Monmouth Register Office, both Fred and Mrs. Martin could scarcely believe her. To them she was still only a child.

That night the newly married pair stayed at the house of the bride's father, but the next day the bride returned alone to her brother's cottage where she stayed for over a month, during which time the husband never entered the house. Bride and groom would meet at the gate of the Martins' cottage, roam the woods together and then Mrs. Pace would return to her brother's house while Harry Pace went back to his own home.

It was not until Fred Martin took a cottage for them that Harry and Beatrice Pace lived together as man and wife.

Poor Harry Pace. He was a strange character with something of the sadist and the masochist combined about him. He would tear handfuls of hair from his head, flap his hands at his side and crow like a cockerel. Within three months of his marriage he tied his wife to the bedrail and left her there all day without food. In all she bore him ten children during the nineteen years of their married life, and it was one of her greatest sorrows that when the babies were coming along he cruelly beat her. As a result, one child was born deaf and dumb and eventually died, while another was paralysed. At the time that I became friendly with her, only five out of her ten children had survived. Pace would fly into insane rages during which he stopped at nothing. He beat out the

brains of his wife's pet dog on the flagstones outside the cottage. He locked her out in the biting cold of a winter's night clad in nothing but a nightgown.

Such was the background story of this woman when I sought her out that night. She told me how everything had been prepared for her husband's burial when it was stopped on the Coroner's instructions and an inquest ordered. A fact which I had already gleaned from Inspector Bent of the Coleford Police.

All through the ensuing inquest proceedings—twenty-two in all—I used to drive in to Fetterhill to bring Mrs. Pace to the court. Only too well she knew that the finger of suspicion was pointing at her, and a lesser woman might easily have broken under the strain. Her one thought was for her children.

'I am not afraid for myself,' she told me more than once when I called to take her down to the coroner's court, 'but nobody can look after the children like I can.'

And then she would busy herself getting them washed and dressed for school, give them their breakfast, lovingly tend little Jean and see that everything was tidy before entering the car on yet another sorry mission.

After the day's hearing we would have tea at the home of Mrs. Paddock, a friend of the widow who kept the 'King's Head' at Coleford, before driving back to Fetterhill. It was a very beautiful sight to see the joy with which the children greeted their mother. I used generally to spend an hour playing with Doris and her dolls or having a romp with Leslie and Teddy, the latter a regular scamp of a boy. An inveterate smoker was Teddy, aged seven I think, who stuck at nothing to get hold of a 'fag'. Many is the time he has rifled my pocket and slid off with a cigarette to smoke behind a friendly wall where nobody could see him.

From January till the end of May the inquest hearings went on week by week. And all the time I kept in friendly touch with the tragic widow and her relatives. I could see her gradually wilting under the strain and anxiety of suspense that tortured her. I was convinced of her innocence and never ceased to tell her that no matter what happened, her innocence would eventually be

established. I knew however that it was going to be a rough journey for this little woman before she was freed of all worry.

Let me come then to that tragic mornin<sup>g</sup> in May when Mrs. Pace left the only home she had known for years never again to return except for one fleeting visit after her acquittal at Gloucester.

I had driven out as usual. There was Mrs. Pace, smiling and serene, with Dorothy and baby Jean. The other three children had gone to school. Poor little Doris had gone off without any breakfast. Sick with anxiety on her mother's account, she simply could not eat. Mrs. Pace was sitting on the couch with Jean in her arms. She was softly crooning to the mite.

It was the last day of the inquest. But about the whole demeanour of Mrs. Pace there was a serenity which I had not seen for a long time. It was as though she sensed what was going to happen and had prepared herself. She gave directions to Dorothy about the children's midday meal and then, 'Be sure you boil baby's bottle before giving her her feed,' she counselled, and Dorothy nodded that she understood. She was too full for words. The widow continued crooning to the baby in her arms until at last little Jean drifted off to sleep. Her mother laid her gently in the perambulator and bent over to give her a loving kiss.

'If I'm not coming back, Mr. O'Donnell will come and tell you,' she told the girl, but Dorothy would not hear of it.

'You'll be back, Mam,' she said, 'Mr. O'Donnell'll bring you.'

We got to the gate. Mrs. Pace turned and rushed back to give her baby another kiss. Then we entered the car and started on our drive to the court. On the journey Mrs. Pace told me of the dream she had dreamt that night.

'I dreamed that I was being driven away in a big black car,' she told me. 'There was a vase of white lilies in the car. As we went along I saw Mrs. Sayes (a very good neighbour of Mrs. Pace) standing at the side of the road holding little Jean in her arms. I struggled to get at her but couldn't, and then—I found I was awake and little Jean was crying in my arms. I hugged her to me and suddenly she said "Dad-dad-dad". Those were the first words she had ever spoken in her life.'

Through the waving screen of the beautiful Forest of Dean we drove on that bright May morning. At the previous hearing Mrs. Pace had elected to go into the witness-box to give evidence in spite of the Coroner's very proper warning that she need not unless she so desired. But brother Fred had instructed Mr. Trevor Wellington, a well-known Gloucester solicitor, to appear at the inquest on her behalf, and it was this brilliant solicitor who advised the widow to give evidence.

This was no light ordeal, for in so doing Mrs. Pace laid herself open to the rigorous questioning of Mr. Maurice Carter, the coroner.

On the last morning of the inquest then there was only the summing-up of the Coroner and—the verdict of the jury. We entered the court together and Mrs. Pace took her usual seat just in front of a huge circular stove which stood in the centre of the room. A screen hiding her from public view was placed round her, and she sat with her head leaning back against the screen, on her face an expression of absolute composure.

Presently there was a bustle in court as the Coroner entered with a voluminous file of documents under his arm. In a few moments he began to address the jury. On his right sat the Chief Constable of Gloucester. At the table where sat the jury was my old friend Chief Inspector George Cornish (now retired) and Detective-Sergeant Campion, killed during the last war.

In view of the vast amount of evidence which had been given, the summing-up was one of the shortest I ever remember, lasting considerably less than an hour. At the end of it the court was cleared while the jury considered their verdict: Mrs. Pace with her friend Mrs. Sayes went across to have some tea. Little knots of people stood at the street corner discussing the case. Meanwhile the central figure in the drama was expressing the wish that she could run up to the cottage to see how the children were getting on.

An hour went by and then there was a sudden stir outside the court. Women fought their way up the stone steps, clinging to the railings on either side in order to maintain their foothold. A

hefty sergeant of police held them back and ordered them to 'make way'. Mrs. Pace, a frail figure in deep mourning, mounted the steps. Shortly afterwards she was seated in her usual seat just behind Inspector Cornish. The policewoman was at her side. The jury, grave and solemn-looking, never once glanced at the widow.

There was a drawn look on her face and the tension in the court rose high as the Coroner called upon the foreman of the jury to declare their verdict. It came loud and clear.

'Harry Pace met his death by arsenical poisoning administered by some person or persons other than himself, and in our view the case calls for further investigation.'

What is called 'an open verdict', leaving it open for the police to pursue their inquiries and take such action as they thought fit. I heaved a sigh of relief on behalf of the widow with whom I had been in such close contact throughout the months of suspense she had undergone. There would be a breathing space I felt, during which facts might come to light proving her innocence. But I had reckoned without the Coroner.

To my amazement he ordered the jury to retire once more telling them that, 'Only the committal of a person after a Coroner's inquiry can bring about an investigation, which cannot take place unless there is some person named. It is necessary for you to name a person if a person is to be charged.'

So the jury retired once more. Already they had spent nearly an hour considering the evidence ere returning their first verdict. Now they went out again to consider the point raised by the coroner.

Twenty-five minutes elapsed and then, with even greater solemnity than before they returned with their revised verdict. They found that the arsenic from which Harry Pace died had been administered by Mrs. Beatrice Annie Pace.

An anguished cry burst from the lips of the woman named.

'No, I didn't—' she moaned, 'I didn't.'

It was a tense moment in that crowded breathless court as the slim black-clad figure slumped in her chair, sobbing piteously,

her arms hanging helplessly by her side, her head bowed low, as she moaned her denial of guilt.

The burly figure of Inspector Bent leaned over her, while a trim, neatly-uniformed policewoman laid gentle hands upon Mrs. Pace and half-carried, half-dragged her from the court.

As she was taken away the stricken woman moaned, rather than cried, 'I didn't do it—I didn't.'

Never have I witnessed a more poignant or dramatic scene than this arrest of Mrs. Pace.

From the back of the court a woman's voice was heard. 'It is wicked,' she cried, and I with many of my Press colleagues were of the same opinion. Nor were we alone in our view.

This decision on the part of the Coroner about 'naming' a person led not only to a public outcry, but to a legal controversy. Even the staid and well-informed *Law Journal* declared (after the trial of Mrs. Pace of course) that the 'Coroner's jury returned, as we suggest, with *no jurisdiction whatever*, a verdict of murder against Mrs. Pace.'

In the House of Commons too, Mr. Hopkin Morris, M.P., was greeted with loud cheers, when a month or two later he introduced a bill to limit the duty of a coroner to finding the cause of death and debarring him from naming guilty persons in a verdict. A commission was set up to inquire into the matter.

However, the drama was not yet over. Downstairs in the police-station Mrs. Pace was being carefully tended by a doctor and policewoman. She was in a state of utter collapse, and wept continuously. She asked about her children, and was assured that they would be cared for and looked after.

Meanwhile, an occasional petty sessions court had been convened, two magistrates having been obtained for the purpose. One was a woman. At half-past three in the afternoon—the verdict of the Coroner's jury having been given about 1.35—Mrs. Pace was brought from down below and half-lifted into the court.

The Clerk of the Court read over the charge, and at once there was a fresh outburst of weeping from the unhappy woman. Inspector Bent gave formal evidence of arrest.

The court then adjourned until the following Tuesday, the weeping woman replying in a faint voice, 'No, sir,' when asked whether she had anything to say why she should not be remanded in custody.

Then, for the third time that day, the people streamed out into the streets, there to hang about once more to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Pace as she was driven to Cardiff Prison in company with Inspector and Mrs. Bent, and the policewoman.

They drove off in a closed car direct from the yard, the car sweeping out and up the hill almost before anyone had time to notice it. A brother of the accused woman was standing near, waiting, and he waved to his sister as the car sped off in the direction of Cardiff.

Another brother, Fred Martin, had been granted a short interview with his sister before she left, and although she was in a terrible state of collapse, and in spite of her own sorrow, her thought was for the children whom she was compelled to leave.

She begged Fred to sleep in the house with the children so that they should not be frightened, and he let her think that he would do so. But in the meantime I had been busy driving round to various friends and relatives, and it was arranged that Dorothy, the eldest girl of 17, and Leslie, the 10-year-old boy, should live with an aunt in Clearwell. Doris was to stay with Mrs. Paddock of the 'King's Head', Coleford. The little boy Teddy was to stay with an uncle at Sling, whilst Mrs. Sayes had consented to look after the baby.

Having made the necessary arrangements we journeyed out to the little cottage where Dorothy had remained with the baby. Already the news of her mother's arrest had reached her, and she was wondering what was to happen. 'I can look after the children until Mother comes back,' she volunteered; but it was soon explained to her that this would not be necessary. Doris had not then returned from school, but Teddy, the young scamp of 6, was home, his face plastered with coloured chalks.

'Where's Mam?' were the first words of Doris when she came in. Mrs. Sayes suggested that I might be the best person to explain

to the little girl something of what had happened, and I took her into the garden to see some little chicks which had hatched out that very day. I told her that her mummy would be away for a little while, and that she was going to stay with Mrs. Paddock till 'Mam' came back. I shall never forget the unutterable misery in that child's eyes.

'I know—' she said, stemming back the tears. 'I know.' I drove her down to Mrs. Paddock's, and my last view of her was as she stood waving me good-bye the next morning, blowing kisses.

In the meantime, Mrs. Pace had been driven off to Cardiff Gaol, and I can best describe the uncanny portent of her dream by quoting a part of one of her letters to me, written whilst she was in gaol.

In this letter she wrote: 'Do you remember the last morning I was home? Do you remember how I went back three times and kissed my babe? Little did I think then that I should not come back

home to her. And there is more than that. Just think of my dream I had. I told you of it. Did it not come quite true? Yes, quite true, worse luck, and I shall never forget it.'

On the day that she was taken to Cardiff Prison on the coroner's inquisition she was driven away in a large black car such as she had seen in her dream. *In that car was a vase containing white lilies.* And as it went on its journey Mrs. Pace saw Mrs. Sayes with baby Jean in her arms.

I kept in constant touch with both Mrs. Pace and her family during the weeks that followed. I was present all through the police court proceedings, as closely packed with drama as had been those of the inquest. I saw the widow in the final stages of the magisterial hearings, a tragic broken figure, collapsed and in a dead swoon, her head with hat removed and hair dishevelled, resting on the rails of the dock.

During the inquest proceedings so many Pressmen were present covering the story that room had to be specially provided for us. John Tay of the *News of the World* and myself were given chairs in the dock—not without ribald comments from our Fleet Street colleagues.

Now, on that last day of the police court hearing, the dock was occupied by Mrs. Pace. After the speeches of Dr. W. R. Earengay who now appeared for the widow, and of Mr. G. R. Paling representing the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Bench retired to consider whether they should commit the prisoner for trial. For over an hour they were absent and then they returned to court. Some minutes elapsed before Mrs. Pace was brought up from the cells below. Long before she entered the court her cries could be heard outside, and then, a pathetic figure with tear-stained face, stumbled rather than walked into the court, being assisted into the dock.

Solemnly the chairman of the Bench announced that they had unanimously decided on a committal, and in that moment Mrs. Pace crumpled up, sagging down in the chair which had been provided for her. One of the women prison officers bent the fainting woman's head down low while the Clerk of the Court

went on reading the committal order. It was some moments before he realised that the woman in the dock was senseless, incapable of hearing a word he was saying. It was left to Dr. Earengay to plead 'not guilty' for his unconscious client, 'reserving her defence'.

An hour later I lifted Doris Pace on to my shoulders when the sudden surging of the crowd that lined the street told me her mother was about to leave the court. The child was holding a doll in her arms, her face ashine with eagerness to catch a glimpse of her beloved 'Mam'. She waved frantically as the car approached, and Mrs. Pace leaning forward, smiled and waved back blowing kisses to her daughter, while the cheers of the crowd rang in her ears.

Yes! throughout all the weeks of her ordeal Mrs. Pace was the recipient of public sympathy such as I have never known before or since. From all over the country people sent money to provide a fund for her defence. Doris and the other children were inundated with dolls and toys of every kind, and letters came pouring in to Mr. Trevor Wellington, the Gloucester solicitor.

And all the time I was writing to the widow in gaol, telling her about the children whom I continued to visit, and receiving letters in return. Nor were these letters without literary merit as may be gathered from the following extract:

'Well, Mr. O'Donnell, I am ever so glad you went and saw all the children before you left home. Fred (*her brother*) is coming to see me on Saturday, but I should very much like to see you too, but I expect you are very busy just now, but I think you would spare a minute if only you knew my feelings. In fact I am sure you would.'

'I am so glad little Teddy is happy, as you know what a little darling, and also what a scamp, he can be sometimes, but thank God I have always been a good mother, and if God gives me health and strength to pull through this, and get home to them all I will do my duty as I have always done both by them and to Harry.'

'You know, Mr. O'Donnell, that if I had done anything I should not have been here to face it. My conscience is clear, but

oh—it is so terrible to wonder and wonder what is going to be the end of it all, and spend hours thinking what will become of my babies if anything happens to me. But it can't happen, can it? I have not done anything. And now, dear Mr. O'Donnell, I must bring this scribble to an end, but please may I ask you to write me another long letter like you wrote me last week with such good news in it. I will now close with my best wishes to you—I remain, Yours sincerely, BEATRICE A. PACE.'

There came the trial! That sensational five-day hearing was notable for the shattering cross-examination of witnesses for the prosecution, both expert and lay, by Mr. Norman Birkett, now the Rt. Hon. Sir Norman Birkett, P.C., Lord Justice of Appeal. His forensic and legal skill quickly disposed of any evidence even mildly implicating Mrs. Pace until at the end of the case for the prosecution he submitted that there was no case to go to the jury.

The judge concurred and ordered the jury to return a verdict of 'Not Guilty'. There was a stir in court as the public leaned forward in the gallery to catch a glimpse of Mrs. Pace while the foreman of the jury stood up to return this formal verdict. Without a single witness being called on behalf of the defence this unhappy woman who had endured so much was triumphantly acquitted of the murder of her husband.

At once this was the signal for an outburst of clapping and cheering. For a moment the woman in the dock sat with bowed head. She seemed dazed until that veteran pathologist Dr. Bronte sitting immediately in front of the dock ready to be called for the defence if need be, reached back and grasped her by the hand.

'You are free,' he whispered smiling broadly.

I then witnessed something which I have never seen either before or since at any trial for murder. Mr. Norman Birkett, counsel for the defence, also reached over the front of the dock and shook his client by the hand. He too was smiling and as Mrs. Pace leaned forward to voice her heartfelt thanks for his services, he simply said, 'And that's that. I am so glad, Mrs. Pace.'

A few minutes later in the grand jury room Mrs. Pace was clasping her daughters Dorothy and Doris in frenzied hugs. Other

relatives and friends were with her. I was on the steps outside the court watching the crowds roaring their heads off as the news reached them. I saw Mr. Birkett and his clerk, Archie Bowker, literally fighting their way through the cheering populace, eager to pay tribute to the part he had played in proving the innocence of Mrs. Pace. Presently a messenger approached me.

‘Mrs. Pace wants to see you in the grand jury room,’ he breathlessly remarked. Very soon I was one of that glad party, and as I greeted her, she gave me a resounding kiss, and produced from her handbag a photograph of my two young sons, Roy and Peter, aged eleven and eight respectively. I had sent it to her saying that ‘the imps’ would bring her luck. She waved the picture before my eyes, ‘I’ve kept the photograph of the imps,’ she cried, ‘and they brought me luck as you said they would.’

I was the only Pressman admitted to that reunion party following the dramatic climax of the trial.

Still the crowd waited on, determined not to miss the chance of displaying their sympathy and delight that the little woman had come safely through her ordeal.

Nor were they denied. On this day of days Mrs. Pace was brought through the high arched front entrance of the Assize Court. At her appearance the street rang with the cheers of the people, as, escorted by her friends with police on either side, she was rushed into a waiting car which could only move slowly off on account of the thousands of people who crowded round it. She was taken to the home of her friend Mrs. Paddock at Coleford. There, crowds waited her arrival, almost fighting their way through the doors of the little hotel. Mrs. Pace had to appear at the window to wave her thanks. Her children were brought to her, and I noticed that she could hardly speak for very joy at being with them once more.

I was the only Pressman present at the party of celebration held in the large room at the King’s Head Hotel. It was a happy party, and one that will always live in my memory.

On my first visit to Fetterhill, my object was to get the story behind the story concerning the death of Harry Pace and the

reason for the Coroner stopping his funeral, but after meeting Mrs. Pace on that occasion, however, I realised that here was a human story which was going to leave its mark upon the public mind. Even so, I did not fully realise how great an impact this story was going to make on the imagination of Press and public alike, and it was not till some time later—when the inquest proceedings were well under way—that it became obvious from every point of view that the story of Mrs. Pace was going to provide one of the most intriguing and interesting narratives of the century.

By that time I had become very friendly with the whole family, and was accepted into their midst as one of them. Naturally I realised the whole trend of the inquest proceedings and understood the unhappy position of the widow. I took Fred Martin aside and explained how things appeared to me. I told him that in the event of circumstances becoming more serious for his sister than they were at the moment, it would be well to make sure that she was adequately defended by a counsel of renown. I explained that the *Empire News* would be prepared to pay for such representation in return for the exclusive story of Mrs. Pace at some future date.

Fred told me that he had engaged Mr. Trevor Wellington, and had left all legal arrangements in his hands. At once I visited Mr. Wellington who explained that when the matter arose he would get in touch with me, but in the meantime the whole thing must remain in abeyance.

As the weeks dragged on and it became more and more clear that the trial by inquest of Mrs. Pace was attracting greater and greater public interest, Mr. Wellington was approached by other newspapers equally eager to get the story in the event of her being sent for trial. Meanwhile I was in regular contact with Mrs. Pace who had expressed the wish that if anybody got the story it should be me. But—very properly to my mind, although to my disappointment—Mr. Wellington decided that at the appropriate time, it should be put up for auction, although he expressed the hope that I should eventually have it.

That was the position at the conclusion of the trial. Mrs. Pace was acquitted on the Friday, and Mr. Wellington invited representatives from all the newspapers interested, to be at his office the following morning. Meanwhile I got in touch with my editor to elicit the limit to which I could go in my bidding. What that amount was I do not propose to say.

Rapidly the bidding rose until the sum of £2,500 was reached—the amount paid for the Fahmy story you will remember. It then continued to rise by £50 a time until the sum of £3,000 was offered.

Mr. Wellington looked across at me. I shook my head. I was out of it. The solicitor remarked, 'I am very sorry, Mr. O'Donnell. I would have been glad for you to have it.'

'£3,050,' murmured Russell from the *Sunday Express*, and the story of Mrs. Pace was sold.

To say that I was disappointed is to put it mildly. What might have been yet another scoop for me had gone astray. My disappointment was, however, assuaged to some extent by the fact that there was little that could be told in the *Sunday Express* which I did not already know about the life of Mrs. Pace, with the result that I was able to write a very full and factual series of articles telling the whole story as I knew it under my own name instead of—as I had hoped—under the name of Mrs. Pace.

But our friendship did not cease then, for, as I have mentioned, so soon as she had fulfilled her contract with the *Sunday Express*, she wrote asking me to meet her in London and it was then that she presented me with the cigarette case. Later I visited her in the cottage purchased for her by Mr. Wellington at Roseberry Avenue, Gloucester and renewed acquaintance with the children. For many years I received a Christmas card from her, but I have not heard of her for some time now.

To-day, I believe, she is living quietly in a little Welsh village far removed from the place where she had known so much sorrow. But although the years may bring her peace they will never bring her forgetfulness of the grimdest of all ordeals which anyone can undergo—a trial for life.

## *Of This and That*

I WAS sitting in the restaurant at the County of London Session, Court in Newington Butts one morning, sipping a cup of coffee and chatting with Lily, my favourite waitress, while waiting for a case to come on, when a girl in her early twenties came and sat opposite me at the same table.

She was a pretty girl with a mass of curly dark hair and a pair of innocent-looking brown eyes. She was smartly but sedately dressed, yet from the way she drummed on the table with her fingers, I got a feeling that she had something on her mind and was nervous about something.

Probably a witness in a case, I thought.

Lily took her order—a strong black coffee—and I immersed myself in my morning paper.

‘What are you up for?’ queried a pleasingly husky voice.

I looked up. Yes! the girl was addressing me. I knocked the ash from my cigarette.

‘I’m not up for anything,’ I replied. ‘I’m here on a job of work.’

‘You’re not a “D”?’ she asked in a suspicious voice and I smiled. ‘D’ is short for detective in underworld parlance.

‘No!’ I hastened to assure her. ‘I’m just a simple-minded newspaper man.’

‘Oh!’ was all she said, and there was more of distaste than favour on her face as she regarded me over the brim of her coffee cup. I returned to my paper. Presently she spoke again.

‘What do you think I’ll get?’

‘Well—it depends on what you have done and the nature of the charge.’

‘Pinching a wallet,’ she answered laconically.

It was my turn to say, ‘Oh!’

'But I didn't do it, mister,' she hurriedly went on to explain. 'It was like this. I was having a quick drink with another girl in a pub 'off Jermyn Street'—that's my beat you know—when in comes a likely pick-up. You know—well dressed and natty and evidently ripe for a bit of fun. He soon got into conversation with us, and then insisted on taking us both home to his flat for the night. When I woke in the morning the other girl had flapped. She must have got up while we were asleep and gone down his pockets and mizzled with his wallet, because when I shook him awake he found it was missing.'

'Of course he raised hell and said he was going to give me in charge. I got frightened and did a bunk. He couldn't chase me because he was still in his pyjamas.'

'About three weeks later he saw me in Lisle Street, tagged me till he saw a cop and then handed me over. When I came up at Marlborough Street I told the queer fellow (*magistrate*) I didn't know anything about it, but I could see he didn't believe me so I said I'd be sent for trial. So here I am,' she concluded with a shrug of her shoulders.

'Did you know anything about it?' I queried, because I could see a loophole in the case against her.

'Of course I didn't, but the bloke had lost his wallet, and I'd been sleeping with him,' replied the girl, and then, rather hopelessly, 'anyway I don't suppose the jury would believe me, so what's the use? Besides the cops said that if I pleaded guilty I'd probably get a lighter sentence. What do you think I'll get?'

'Nothing,' I answered, 'if you do as I tell you. First of all you must plead "Not guilty". This will mean that the prosecutor will have to give his version of what happened that night. You can then ask him questions—cross-examine him you know.'

'Now listen very carefully. Ask him right out if it was *his* suggestion that you should *both* go home with him. He can't possibly deny it, because he need not have done so if he hadn't wanted to. His admission will not impress the jury too favourably towards him.'

'Your next question will be whether you remained at his side

all the night through, and whether it was *you* who awakened him in the morning. Again he will be compelled to admit that you are right, and you need only ask one final question: Put it to him like this: "Couldn't I have got away with the other girl without you knowing anything about it?"

'You won't have to worry any more after that. Now just let's run over it to see if you know your little piece.' She was a pretty wide young thing and when we had gone over it once or twice, I found she was absolutely word perfect.

'Now do as I say,' I impressed upon her, 'and there's no court in the land which could convict you.'

She went off smiling. 'See you afterwards,' she said adding, 'I hope.'

I was not present at her trial but everything went off as I prophesied. Sir Robert Wallace, that generous and kindly arbiter of justice, explained to the jury that the girl had no case to answer and instructed them to return a verdict of not guilty.

This they did, and a little later on I was seized upon by a beaming young lady who insisted on buying me a lunch.

Before she left the courthouse that afternoon she thanked me again and pressed upon me a little bit of pasteboard. It was a visiting card, bearing her name and address and telephone number.

'You come up any old time,' she told me, 'just give me a ring beforehand. You'll always be welcome.'

It was some years before I saw her again. I was making inquiries into the Soho murder of French Fifi. Fifi was also a lady of uneasy virtue who had come to an untimely end, and I was anxious not only to get a background story of the victim, but, if possible, a photograph.

Needless to say among members of the 'profession', the murder of Fifi was the one great topic of awed but animated conversation, so I turned into the haunts where they foregathered. It was thus that I came upon my girl friend of the London Sessions. She greeted me as if I were a long lost brother, chided me for not calling to see her, and then asked 'what bit of dirt' I was on at the moment.

I drew her aside and confided to her my immediate needs. A photograph of the murdered woman and a few details about her.

'I know where I can get a picture,' she said, and I arranged to meet her at a specified time. Sure enough she produced a photograph of French Fifi, and gave me a lot of information. When I tried to slip a few pound notes into her hand, she became very indignant.

'Don't you dare insult me, Bernard,' she said. Yes, by this time we were on those sort of terms; Bernard and Miriam.

One other amusing incident comes to mind in connection with the County of London Sessions. It is the custom on the opening day of the Sessions—which are held every fortnight—to take the 'pleas' of the prisoners unfortunate enough to figure in the current calendar. As their names are called, they enter the dock one by one to make their plea. Then in reply to the question of the Clerk of the Court 'How say you are you Guilty or Not Guilty?' they plead 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty' as the case may be. Those who plead not guilty are put back to be tried later on, those who plead guilty being tried right away.

Very often—to suit the convenience of counsel on either side, a case may be fixed for a certain day later in the week. It was so in the case of the two women prisoners called upon to answer separate charges of shoplifting. Both pleaded not guilty, one being 'put back' to be dealt with later in the day, while the other—whom I shall call Alice—was again released on bail till the next day when she would be put on trial.

The chief witness against both prisoners was the woman detective employed by a famous West End store for the purpose of keeping a watchful eye open for pilferers of this kind.

Now Alice was well-known to the police, having been convicted on more than one occasion. She was the daring and resourceful leader of a notorious gang known as the 'Forty Elephants', so-called because its members were mostly women of giant stature, who came from the Elephant and Castle area of Walworth. They were expert 'hoists' (shoplifters) and had caused many a headache to store detectives all over London.

Alice was an amazon nearly six feet in height and of striking appearance. When she learned that the other woman would be up for trial later in the day, she knew that the store detective would be anchored to the court-house until that case was over, in order to give evidence.

Promptly she left the court, hopped into a taxi and ordered the driver to take her to the store now bereft of its guardian angel—the woman detective at the London Sessions. Once there Alice got busy and succeeded in getting away with several rolls of silk beneath the voluminous and expensive fur coat she was wearing.

Of course, the loss was soon discovered with the result that when the store detective returned from the Sessions, she was informed of the theft. It required no description of the suspected person by the saleswoman to put her on the scent. The very daring of the theft caused her to wrinkle her nose as she remarked, 'That's Alice . . .

The same evening she made a pilgrimage to the various haunts where she knew members of the Elephant Gang were wont to meet. She was lucky, for in a little back-street café, she came upon Alice proudly displaying the proceeds of her coup and doubtless arranging for its profitable distribution. Alice was arrested and eventually took uncomfortable lodgings in Holloway Gaol once more at the public expense.

But let us refresh ourselves in the presence of the famous rather than the notorious.

The first time I met Princess Bariatinsky was early in 1914 when she was playing Anna Karenina in the play of Tolstoy's novel of that name at the Ambassadors Theatre, London. I went along to get a story of her romantic marriage to the prince. The shadows of the first World War had not then enveloped us, and there was no thought of the dangers and horrors she was to experience during the Bolshevik revolution in the mind of Lydia Yavorska as we sat chatting in her dressing room at the theatre just before she went on to play her exacting rôle. Lydia Yavorska, I would explain, was the stage name of the princess.

It was not the first time she had appeared on the stage in London, for some five years previously she had made her début in *La Dame aux Camélias*. She also appeared at the London Coliseum in dramatic sketches, and starred at the big music-halls in Manchester, Bristol and Glasgow. From my point of view therefore she was a big story, and hence my visit to the Ambassadors Theatre for the purpose of an interview.

It was as an actress that she preferred to be known for it was as an actress that she had leaped to favour at the Court of the Tsar who, with his family, was to come to so dreadful and tragic an end at the hands of the Bolsheviks.

Lydia Yavorska was one of the most beautiful women at the Russian court. Devoted to her art, she was as great an actress as she was lovely. Thus she attracted the attention of Prince Bariatinsky, a wealthy and popular Russian noble who fell in love with her. Reclining on a sofa in the dressing-room, Lydia Yavorska described the luxurious life at court with the prince.

'When I agreed to marry him,' she told me, 'I said I would do so only on the understanding that I should be allowed to carry on my stage career. He knew that I was devoted to it, and he, being as greatly devoted to me, gladly gave his consent.'

The actress went on to tell me some of her adventures in the Caucasus at the hands of bandits, and of the lengths to which admirers went in order to try and capture her favours. And all the time as she talked, there sat quietly on another chair a tall slim man to whom she introduced me.

'This is John Pollock,' she said, 'who adapted Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* for me.'

We shook hands and discussed our mutual interest. He as a playwright and author, myself as a reporter. The only son of Sir Frederick Pollock, I found him a charming and interesting man; nor did I dream as we sat talking that I was to see him again after he had made an almost miraculous escape from the Bolsheviks. Or, that years later, he would become the husband of the beautiful, vital woman whom I was interviewing. It was a romance of war- and famine-stricken Russia.

Five years elapsed before I learned the story of how the romance of Lydia Yavorska and John Pollock blossomed amid the carnage of war when they were brought into association through their respective efforts on behalf of the suffering Russians. Early in 1919 I learned that the princess had escaped from the Bolsheviks and succeeded in reaching this country. She was living at 95 Bedford Court Mansions, Bloomsbury, and there I repaired to renew my acquaintance with her and get some first-hand information regarding Russia, then in the throes of the Bolshevik revolution.

It was a ghastly story she had to tell as we sat at breakfast together. Strangely enough as I arrived at the flat I was joined on the doorstep by John Pollock, looking slightly older than when I had last seen him, but by no means less distinguished. He too had managed to escape from the Bolsheviks after being imprisoned by them and sentenced to death.

The Princess told me how she returned to her native land very soon after Germany declared war on Russia. She went back to throw herself whole-hearted into rescue work in connection with the Russian Red Cross. Life at the court of the Tsar, her stage career, everything was subordinated to her Red Cross work. From 1915 till 1918 she remained there till the overthrow of Tsardom and the running amok of the newly liberated populace. In the meantime Prince Bariatinsky had died leaving Lydia Yavorska a widow.

During this period John Pollock had also reached Russia. For years he had been a recognised authority on all things Russian, could speak the language like a native, and was *au fait* with all the political trends of the period. He went out to take up the post of Chief Commissioner in Russia and Poland of the British section of the Russian Red Cross.

It was inevitable, in view of their joint activities with the Red Cross, that John Pollock and the princess should meet frequently. And it was through this propinquity in a good cause that they fell in love.

When the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 came about both the

princess and John Pollock came under the disapproving eye of the leaders of the revolt. Both had figured prominently at the court of the Tsar. Both had been engaged in supporting the régime so bitterly hated by the Bolsheviks. Had either of them remained in Russia there is little doubt as to what their fate would have been.

The princess was the first to get away. The war was still in progress. In March, 1917, Tsar Nicholas abdicated making the way clear for the return of the exiled Lenin. The last Russian offensive in the war under Brusilov petered out and in the autumn of that year the Kerensky government fell. Lenin and Trotsky became the recognised leaders of the Soviets and in March, 1918, met the Germans at Brest-Litovsk and signed the harsh peace terms dictated by their enemies.

Princess Bariatinsky only just managed to elude her would-be captors and reach Helsingfors (now Helsinki) and safety, before the full force of the Bolshevik purge began in real earnest.

Nearly a year elapsed before John Pollock was successful in making his dramatic escape. In the meantime he was imprisoned and subjected to the usual questioning which has, through the years, been perfected into psychological indoctrination.

Then one day, to his surprise, he found the door of his cell had been left open. He walked out, and with his knowledge of Russian, bluffed his way past the guards, traversing corridor after corridor until he reached a sort of cross-passage.

Which way should he turn? That was the problem which faced him. A grim problem indeed, for he realised that if he went the wrong way he might well find himself back in the arms of his gaolers. One way meant life and liberty. The other meant torture and death. He dare not ask which way to take for suspicion would have been aroused.

Fortunately his luck was in. He took the *right* turn but emerged from his prison a prey to such dread of recapture that he was a mental wreck by the time he reached Finland in the February of 1919.

Thus we three, who had met in the peaceful dressing-room of

Lydia Yavorska five years before, sat together and ate grapefruit for breakfast in the safety of that unpretentious flat in Bedford Court Mansions. In the vibrant voice which had thrilled countless thousands during her stage career, the princess told me of the horrors she had witnessed after the Bolsheviks had seized power.

It was a terrible story told with all the dramatic emphasis of a great actress. But this time there was no acting; nor was the plot that of a stage play. It was a drama with living characters strutting the stage.

At once I realised that this was no story to tell in mere interview form, and I turned to the princess.

'I would like you to write the story as you have told it to me,' I said. 'I would like to publish it in the next issue of the *Empire News* so that the world may know the conditions in Russia under Bolshevik rule.'

With set face she agreed, and I make no apology for quoting the following extracts from the story which she sent me.

'I have seen Holy Russia—a land of teeming millions, of inexhaustible wealth, or boundless natural resources, *including food*—reduced to a blood-soaked Hell, foul with disease, ravenous with hunger, cowed and terror stricken beneath the iron heel—of Germany.

'When women of gentle birth and tender upbringing offer themselves to the lustful embraces of coarse drink-sodden soldiers and sailors, and when they literally throng the station approaches as I myself have seen them—ready, nay eager to sacrifice themselves for a scrap of dry grey bread which you would hesitate to give your pigs, one perhaps realises the terrible degree of humiliation and degradation to which the people of Russia have been brought.'

The princess went on to describe how the craving for food had resulted in cannibalism being openly conducted.

'While I was in Bolshevik Russia,' she wrote, 'a woman's leg was offered for sale in a butcher's shop. This ghastly truth should be known throughout the length and breadth of the land, together with the gruesome fact that Chinese criminals are per-

mitted to roam the country and murder whom they will. The bodies of their poor victims are then sold to the butchers.

‘One particularly horrible case was that of a poor mother who lost her two little children. frantic with grief she made inquiries which eventually elicited the tragic fact that her babies had been killed and eaten.’

I wrote a little note thanking the princess for the story, and in reply received the following.

• ‘Dear Mr. O’Donnell,

‘Many thanks for your note received this evening. I am so glad you like the story. Will you do me the favour to remember to print my stage name, Lydia Yavorska, as well as my private name.

‘Yours sincerely, Lydia Yavorska Princess Bariatinsky.’

In the March of 1920 the princess and John Pollock were married at the St. Giles Register Office, but this romance which had survived all the terrors and tortures of the Bolshevik revolution was destined to be of short duration. In the September of 1921, this very fine lady died at Hove. The privations she had endured whilst bringing succour to others had laid the foundation of the illness which brought to an end so brilliant and courageous a career. John Pollock is now Sir John, having inherited the title from his worthy father.

From grave to gay; and believe me, there is plenty of gaiety once you get a gang of crime men enjoying a few hours of blissful relaxation on a job. For when the day’s work is done and one’s story has been telephoned over, there is usually a ‘get together’, and the rest of the night may be spent in a little drinking session, a spot of mild gambling—not always *too* mild I would mention—with pontoon a general favourite—a visit to the local theatre or music-hall or a sing-song into the early hours of the morning.

Practical joking is not left out of the frolics, nor is it always appreciated by the victim of the joke. During the trial of Arthur Rouse at the Northampton Assizes, crime reporters from all the national daily and Sunday papers, together with representatives from many provincial newspapers, were gathered in the famous shoe-making town to ‘cover’ the trial of the blazing car murderer.

Once the day's proceedings were over and stories away, our time was our own. One evening a bunch of us decided to go to the local music-hall to see the revue in which that great artist Doris Hare was playing lead.

After the show we crowded back-stage to pay our respects to Doris and the rest of the cast with the result that we fixed up for a date for the next night after the second house, to take the whole company to supper at a nearby hotel.

Some night, believe me! One figure stands out, that of Con O'Leary, the Irish novelist, who was down with me to write up the story of the trial. I was busy looking after Helen Campbell, the tragic figure whom Rouse had bigamously married, and whose story I was writing, making sure that she was not 'got at' by any of my enterprising comrades in the Street.

Con was at his Irish best on the night of the party, and I can see him now with all the blarney of the Celt swearing undying devotion to Doris, who responded gaily in an imitation brogue which would have done credit to a real colleen.

Nothing came of the romance however, for Doris became the happy wife of a doctor and Con is still a bachelor. It was a jolly time altogether, and if editorial eyebrows should, at this length of time, be raised in speculation as to whether the entertainment went down on the expenses sheets, for myself I can only plead loss of memory. It was so long ago, and I am not so young as I was.

Nor was that the end of the jollification that night. On our return to the Royal Hotel where most of us were staying, we called for a last round of drinks. While these were being consumed, someone suddenly recollected that one of the eminent counsel engaged at the trial, who was also staying at the Royal, was a teetotaller. While the night porter was bringing the drinks this man crept down to the front hall of the hotel and chalked up a 'call' for the teetotal barrister. He timed it for 4.30 a.m. and ordered a bottle of Guinness to be brought at the same time.

We never learned how that innocent night porter fared when he went in at 4.30 a.m., but I do know that there was more than

one complaint about the changing of shoes placed outside the various doors for cleaning. I slept with mine under my pillow.

The following night we were invited to the room shared by Jack Cannell and Cameron Waller (better known as Bill), both of the *Daily Sketch*, to take refreshment. They had provided several bottles of the same, and it may appear tardy gratitude when, at the end of our visit, someone produced a coil of rope and proceeded to tie our hosts to the bedstead with more vigour than scientific knowledge.

There was a big crowd in the room including dear old (since departed) John Tay of the *News of the World*, veteran among reporters, likewise the late Jimmy Dunn of the *Daily Mail* who as 'R. E. Corder' originated the now so popular police court column in our newspapers. Then there was genial Percy Davies, now dead, but at that time editor of the *News of the World*, a number of other well-known crime men including myself, and a very prominent official on the legal side of the administration of justice who for obvious reasons must be nameless.

I shall never forget the scene of pandemonium which ensued on the production of that coil of rope. Jack Cannell, you may remember, had added authorship to his work as crime reporter. He was the author of *The Secrets of Houdini*, the world-famous 'Handcuff King', in which he revealed how Houdini accomplished his marvellous escapes from handcuffs, prison cells, sealed boxes, mailbags and water-filled milk churns. Jack had also intrigued us with several sleight-of-hand tricks with cards.

Maybe it was these facts which inspired his tormentor on this occasion to tie him up to 'see if he can get out of this'.

First of all, the bedclothes and mattress were stripped from the bed, and Jack and Bill Waller were seized and flung on to it. In a few moments they were securely if roughly tied, and then as they lay there helpless but laughing their heads off, the mattress and the bed clothes were piled upon them. The wardrobe and other articles of furniture were then heaped upon these, and they were left to make their escape.

.- The last we heard as we left them was the cry of Bill Waller

during his struggle to get free from his bonds, 'Oh, my guts,' he shouted as the rope cut into him. However they *did* get out, and bore no malice for the rough house which they had suffered.

To go back to the inquest on Harry Pace at Coleford, the proceedings were, as you know, spread over many months before the Coroner's jury returned the verdict resulting in the arrest of Mrs. Pace, which I described in the last chapter. During those prolonged hearings, and seeing the members of the jury week after week, we got to know them very well by sight. So that when we chanced to meet them in the 'local' we would pass the time of day with them, and indulge in a friendly chat. Never about the inquest with which they were concerned, but just the ordinary topics of the day. On one or two occasions we joined in a game of darts.

One night when we were having a few drinks together, the Press boys challenged the members of the jury to a skittles match to be played off at the hotel situated at Symond's Yat, the famous Gloucestershire beauty spot on the Wye.

Behold us then sallying forth one night to strike a blow for Fleet Street in the noble interests of sport. Of course we should never have done it, for I don't think any of us had ever had more than a few stray shots at skittles, and those mostly at fun fairs. Our friendly adversaries on the other hand were men of brawn who could speed a bowl with strength as well as skill. Good countrymen, miners and sheep farmers in addition to other jobs, who were practised in knocking down skittles.

But we had a good time and a joyous evening in spite of receiving a good trouncing at the hands of our opponents. And best of all to my mind was our departure from the field of battle, that skittle alley perched way up above the winding river Wye.

Among us was Jim Jarche, ace of Press photographers, and comic act with a ukelele. Not always comic, I would have you know, for it was something of an education to hear him sing a negro spiritual to the soft self-accompaniment on his 'uke'. During the evening Jim had kept the party in fits of laughter at his imitation of an ape in which he lumbered about the bar tables

and seats, scratching himself, grunting and grimacing for all the world like one of our Darwinian ancestors. He was also pretty nimble in doing sleight-of-hand tricks.

Our skittling game over we went out into the darkness of the night. There were no friendly lights to guide our steps on the way back to Coleford. A silent peace had descended over the countryside. It was broken by the strident cry of Jim.

'Fall in,' he shouted in true military style, for, like most of us there, he had served in France during World War I. Jurymen and Pressmen all mixed up together, entered into the spirit of the thing and 'fell in' in two ranks.

Jim 'inspected' us although I doubt if he could see more than vague shadows. He ordered one or two to see that their buttons were properly cleaned before they turned out on the next parade, and commanded a baldhead among us to get his hair cut.

Then with a brisk command he turned us to the right, and at the head of his ghostly army and to the tune of his ukelele marched us off. Away we went singing about packing up our troubles in an old kit bag, and long long trails a-winding, as we passed through the sleep-bound villages.

Here and there as we journeyed on our way in the dead of night, windows slid up and startled heads popped out, and I have often wondered what those villagers thought as they eyed the ranks of that civilian army lustily singing their songs of a war long since over, for the year was 1928.

On reaching Coleford we were 'dismissed' with all military precision, and the next morning jurors and reporters took their place in the Coroner's Court there to resume their respective public duties.

That I was 'in at the death' of Louis de Rougement was one of the accidents that so often provide a reporter with a story.

I was attending the Clerkenwell Police Court one day in December, 1920, when a friendly solicitor living in the Bloomsbury area remarked casually, 'You remember the Louis de Rougement story, I suppose—or perhaps not. Why, you would only be a little boy at the time.'

'Maybe,' I replied. 'In fact I was about thirteen—just the right age to be interested in the story as it appeared in the *Wide World Magazine*. Why?'

'Well—I hear that he is in the Homœopathic Hospital, Great Ormond Street, quite near to me. It happens that my sister is on the staff there, and she told me about it. Apparently he's pretty ill, and is trying to keep his identity secret for some reason or other. He is there in the name of Louis Redmond, and it was not till a letter arrived for a Louis de Rougement that the similarity of names brought his identity to light.'

Now here was a story indeed. I knew that de Rougement had married in London during the war while I was in France, but all trace of him had apparently been lost after that. I also remembered those boyhood days when I had thrilled to the marrow in reading the story of his amazing Robinson Crusoe exploits in far-off Australia.

I scuttled off to the hospital but could glean little information beyond the fact that Louis Redmond did in fact claim to be the famous de Rougement, but was rather irascible and would receive no visitors.

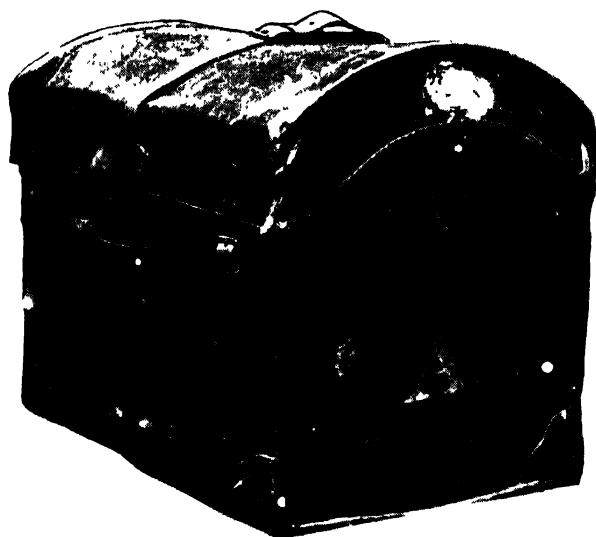
He lay in a ward with fifteen other patients. I managed to catch a glimpse of the old man by resorting to a simple ruse. From the hall porter at the hospital I found out the names and addresses of three other patients in the same ward, and by discreetly approaching the relatives arranged to visit the ward on visiting day as a friend of one of those patients.

On arrival I found that screens had been placed round the bed containing Louis Redmond, but I was able to wangle a peep at him as he lay sleeping.

There was no doubt about it! There lay the man who had, according to general belief, duped an astute editor, and the English public, together with members of the Royal Geographical Society and of the British Association before whom he read a paper on the anthropology of the Australian aborigine. The likeness was unmistakable! The gaunt, boldly chiselled features with the prominent nose; the long flowing white beard and mass of white hair



Pierre Vaquier,  
shortly before arrest.



*Above:* Marks on clothes in the Charing Cross trunk.  
*Below:* The trunk deposited in the cloakroom.

that cascaded over the pillows; they were all reminiscent of the photographs of de Rougement as I remembered him in those days of 1898 when his story first burst upon a startled world.

Of course I was able to write a bit of a story, but not the story I wanted. I wanted an interview with him. I wanted a story from his own lips. I was careful to keep in touch with his subsequent movements and eventually learned that he had left the Homœopathic Hospital and gone to Kensington Infirmary suffering from an incurable internal complaint. Even more valuable from my point of view was the fact that I established contact with the one man who had known him from the time of the publication of his story in 1898. This was Captain Alfred Pearse, the artist who illustrated de Rougement's story when it first appeared. Captain Pearse was best man to the explorer at his marriage to Miss Thirza Cooper, a very handsome woman in business as a financial agent in Regent Street in 1915. This was no May and December romance, for, as Captain Pearse explained, the bride had been twice married before, the second time to a German scientist whom she divorced. But when the war broke out, she was experiencing some difficulty regarding her nationality and Captain Pearse to whom Miss Cooper confided her predicament, mentioned the matter to de Rougement.

'I will marry her,' declared the chivalrous old man. The ceremony duly took place, but the pair never lived together, although they remained good friends. The wife afterwards returned to France.

When I learned that de Rougement was on his deathbed I went to see him at the Infirmary. There was little of adventure in the wrinkled withered features of the old man who had thrilled the world with the story of his adventures. He lay there a shrivelled wasted figure just able to breathe. My mind harked back to the story of over twenty years before.

It was Mr. Heniker Heaton, M.P. for Canterbury, who introduced the explorer to the editor of the *Wide World Magazine* stating that he had a story to tell 'which if true will stagger the world'.

In it de Rougement claimed to have been wrecked on a sand pit of an island off the coast of New Guinea where he lived a Robinson Crusoe existence for nearly three years, subsisting on the fish he caught and the meat from turtles. He built a boat for paddling about the lagoons, rode huge turtles and eventually succeeded in reaching Australia with four natives whom he had rescued from a catamaran cast ashore on his island.

Of his thirty year sojourn among the natives of Australia where he took unto himself a native wife, and his adventures among the cannibals, he wrote stories which entranced the world so that his name was on everybody's lips.

Nor was his amazing story of flying wombats and the habits of little-known aboriginal tribes published without checking and double checking. Louis de Rougement was introduced to the leading scientific societies and institutions in the land.

Geographers tested his knowledge of coastlines and the run of rivers, mountains and such like things. Ethnologists queried him as to the habits and customs of tribes and their languages. He was invited to read papers before the British Association and did so before an audience of hundreds. An arrangement was made for him to go on tour. He sat to John Tussaud for his effigy to be moulded in wax for the great Tussaud exhibition, and the magazine in which his story appeared was sold out as fast as it came from the press.

And then the editor of the *Daily Chronicle* cast doubts on the authenticity of de Rougement's story. He sent out special investigators to Europe and Australia and eventually branded him as an impostor in a series of articles under the title of 'The Swiss Family Grin'. They declared that he was one Henri Louis Grin who went as a servant to Australia in 1874, where he became a rolling stone and doubtless had adventures, but nothing like those he narrated.

Was he an impostor? I don't pretend to know. It is a story on which I should like to have been employed. It must have been one of intriguing interest. Certain it is that both scientists and public were divided into two camps. Those who continued to

believe in this Rip Van Winkle of exploration and those who did not.

Captain Alfred Pearse retained his unabated faith in the truth of de Rougemont's story to the very end. He was a regular visitor to the Infirmary where the old man lay right till his death. Talking of the exposure which brought about the literary extinction of his friend he stated to an *Evening News* reporter: 'He was attacked for his stories about showers of fish and underground lakes. Australian travellers have since confirmed him in both things, and also as to his story of the treasure mountain, but instead of the treasure being silver it was mica and tin.'

'De Rougemont felt the exposure very bitterly, and went to the courts and took an affidavit that his story as he himself told it was true. He was afterwards confused with a man named Le Grin, who died in Australia, and the papers reported that de Rougemont was dead. It was suggested that he should contradict the report, but he allowed it to go unchallenged.'

'I can mention one incident to show how agile he was. After his last lecture in London he missed a gold-handled umbrella. As he was driving along Regent Street in a carriage he espied a man carrying it.

'In a moment he leapt out of the carriage, dashed up to the man, and saying "Thank you for taking care of my umbrella", returned with it in triumph.'

'When the exposure came he had nothing to do, and nowhere to go. I offered him a cottage at Flitwick (Bedfordshire), and he stayed there for some years.'

'He claimed healing powers, and while there he tried to cure a lunatic boy whom he took to live with him. I was told he received £350 for his articles in the magazine. This money he put in a bank but, to add to his troubles, the bank came to grief. He found money somewhere, however, to go travelling, and went to Russia, where he stayed about five years.'

'He claimed to be a priest of many tribes. He was at a house in London a few years ago when one of the Maori chiefs was present. The chief said, "Who is that man? He has given me the

priest sign. I do not like him. He has no business to be a priest of our tribe."

'De Rougemont's memory was extraordinary. One day he met a policeman in London and said, "You look like an Australian." The constable replied that he was. De Rougemont asked where he came from; was it Sydney? "North of that," said the policeman. To every place de Rougemont suggested the constable kept saying "North of that". At last De Rougemont said. "I only know of one house farther north, and that is a house that has seven poplar trees in front of it."

"Good heavens! Who are you?" exclaimed the constable. "That is my father's house."

I doubt whether anybody knew de Rougemont better than Captain Pearse. The old man had other friends, but none so close as the man who had illustrated his stories. In many ways he was a bit of an eccentric, as for example when he went to a London undertaker and ordered a coffin. With fitting melancholy the undertaker asked where he should go to measure the corpse. The long-haired, bearded explorer beat his chest as he exclaimed, 'Here is the body standing right in front of you.'

He explained that the coffin was simply a provision for a future event which we must all meet, and when the order was completed, he paid cash down for it.

It has always been a matter of infinite regret with me that I was more or less beaten on the post in being first away with the story of de Rougemont's death. It happened in this way, and it only goes to show how easy it is to miss the boat. The old man had lingered on from day to day since his admission to the Infirmary on 6th June, 1921.

On 9th June, a story broke in the Midlands and I hurried off to make inquiries on the spot. That night Louis de Rougemont died, but the news of his death did not become known to the Press till midday on 10th June, giving the evening papers a nice break.

I read about it on my arrival back in town and read all the interviews with Captain Pearse. It is a poor consolation to know that I was the only reporter to see him on his death bed.

## *Vaquier the Vain*

EVERY GOOD newspaperman likes to keep a story exclusive to his paper, and I have done some unusual things to this end. Sometimes it was a trivial story which you might think wouldn't matter much anyway; at other times it was connected with a story which had occasioned great public interest. No matter how big or how small, a reporter always likes to keep it to himself. It's just a matter of professional zeal. Again let me quote from my own experience.

Many of you will doubtless remember the Brighton Trunk Crime. In fact there were *two* trunk crimes within a month of each other at Brighton, the bodies of *two* women being found in trunks at places little more than one hundred yards apart.

On Derby Day, 6th June, 1934, somebody deposited a trunk in the left luggage office at Brighton railway station. Eleven days later an attendant noticed a nasty smell emanating from this trunk and called the police. On it being opened the headless and limbless body of a young woman was found wrapped up in brown paper upon which was scrawled in blue pencil, the uncompleted word 'ford'. There was just the trace of a letter before the 'f' but it was not decipherable.

Scotland Yard were called in and Chief Inspector Robert Donaldson arrived to take charge of the inquiries. Under his direction one of the most extensive, and *expensive*, I should imagine, police hunts ever known in this country began.

An army of crime reporters invaded Brighton and got busy. Where there's a torso there *must* have been a head and limbs appeared to be a natural assumption; and, working on this line, the Yard officer circulated railway stations far and near with the

result that within twenty-four hours, a suitcase containing the legs of the Brighton victim was unearthed in the luggage office at King's Cross station, London.

The head and hands, the two most important parts of the human body for purposes of identification, were never found. Nor were the arms.

As in every case of murder or mystery death, the first object of the police was to establish the identity of the victim. It was also my object when I arrived on the scene, although for a different purpose. The police wanted to trace the associates of the deceased in an effort to discover the last person to see her alive, eliminate the innocent and maybe rope in the suspect. My interest lay in locating any friends and relatives of the dead girl in order to get a first-hand story about her. Her mode of life; her work; her hobbies; in fact any little details of human interest, her romances if any, and above all any little bit of information which might give a clue as to the motive behind her murder.

That I failed in getting even the slenderest clue as to the identity of the dead girl or where she came from is just one of those things. I failed in good company, for neither the police nor any of my newspaper colleagues had any better luck. In spite of months of the most concentrated effort the victim of 'Trunk Crime No. 1' remained unidentified. Owing to the publicity given to the story in the Press, however, the names of some seven hundred girls who were missing from home reached the police, and it speaks well for the work of police and Press alike, that only about thirty of that number remained untraced.

It is perhaps a little disquieting to think that the man responsible for the death and dismemberment of the woman in the trunk was never brought to justice in spite of the fact that the police knew his identity. So did I! In fact I interviewed him in his home and have good reason to remember the occasion because when I came away, I left behind a much-prized fountain pen.

Less than a year later I saw this man again. I was attending an inquest in London held upon another young woman, who had died from shock following an attempted abortion. Chief Inspector

Donaldson was in court when the man was called as a witness. But, although, as the Coroner stated, 'the case bristled with suspicion', suspicion was not enough, and he returned an open verdict. Not long afterwards the man left the country and never came back.

I am bound to tell you these brief facts concerning Trunk Crime No. 1 because of the story I want to relate in connection with Trunk Crime No. 2.

Less than a month after the discovery of the body in the trunk at Brighton railway station a second body was found in another trunk at an address in Kemp Street, a turning off the street leading from the station to the beach. There was no delay in identifying the remains of this victim, who turned out to be an ex-dancer known as Violette Kaye. This woman, who was not too fastidious in her sexual relationships, was one of the thirty or so who had remained untraced from the first trunk crime investigations. So that when she was discovered in a rather advanced stage of decomposition, doubled up in a trunk which stood in a room at the Kemp Street house that had been occupied by one Toni Mancini, the police became inquisitive as to his whereabouts, and a hue and cry was raised after him. Now Toni had already been questioned in connection with the other body, because in the course of their inquiries the police discovered that Violette Kaye had been missing since early in May from the basement flat in Park Crescent, Brighton, where she had lived with Toni Mancini. The latter had been able to reassure the police that the victim of Trunk Crime No. 1 was not his mistress because she was a woman of at least forty years of age, whereas the girl found in the Brighton left luggage office was, according to Sir Bernard Spilsbury, probably twenty-five, and not more than twenty-eight.

When, however, Violette Kaye turned up in trunk number two, Chief Inspector Donaldson issued a description through the Press with the result that Toni was arrested at Blackheath, charged with the murder of his paramour, brought to trial and found 'Not Guilty'.

In the meantime Kemsley Newspapers had bought Mancini's story. There was no great resource demanded in this transaction as it was all done through the solicitor who was responsible for the defence of the accused man. When he was acquitted, however, the fun began. To get him away from all the other reporters required a certain amount of evasive strategy. They were naturally and very properly hankering after an interview with this man who had successfully faced his trial for life.

My job was to write the story for the *Empire News*, and I remember how, late on the night of his acquittal, I sat with Toni Mancini in my office at Kemsley House, listening to the most macabre story I have ever heard in all my experience.

He told me how on returning to the flat where he and Kaye lived, he had found the woman lying dead from severe injuries to the head. Because he had a police record he was scared to call the police, so he stood the body up in a cupboard of the room and nailed up the door to prevent anyone discovering it before he could dispose of it. A day or so later, having obtained lodgings in Kemp Street, he decided to take the body with him.

'I got a trunk,' he told me, 'but when I forced open the cupboard door the body was so stiff that I had to use force in order to double it up.'

At length the gruesome remains were packed into the trunk, loaded on to a barrow which was openly wheeled through the busy Brighton thoroughfares from Park Crescent to Kemp Street, where it reposed locked and tied with cord, in the bedroom in which Mancini slept.

'The thought of what was inside that trunk used to haunt me,' he said when relating his reactions to the grimness of his position. There he was in possession of a dead body under circumstances which, to say the least, did not savour of innocence. How to dispose of it? That was the question which faced him.

One day in June he was sitting in the café on the promenade where he worked looking through the morning paper in the hope of finding a winner. Suddenly his attention was attracted by the cry of a newsboy as he ran along the parade with a sheaf of

evening papers under his arm. 'Horrible murder—' was the cry heard by Toni Mancini as he sat there, and then—'Woman's body found in a trunk.'

'I could feel the blood draining from my face,' he told me on that first night of freedom for many months. 'I knew that I must be looking as white as the table-cloth before me. I could not move for a second or two. I seemed paralysed. At last I could bear it no longer. I simply *had* to know the worst. I reeled from the café to where the boy stood surrounded by a crowd of people anxious to "read all about it". I bought a paper, and read the first few lines and almost collapsed. It was *not* my trunk which had been found; it was not Violette's body which had been discovered. It was the body of the girl in the trunk which had been left at Brighton station.'

Maybe you can imagine what Toni Mancini must have felt at that moment when he realised his terrible secret was still safe. No words of mine could ever describe the tension he created as he drew a picture of the terror which gripped him when he heard the strident cry of the paper boy shouting his startling news.

While he was in Lewes Gaol awaiting trial, I got to know that Mancini was receiving letters almost daily from a girl friend. This girl stuck by him all through his ordeal until his innocence was proved and he stepped from the dock a free man. He told me of his intention to marry his 'Mayflower' as he called her, and I realised that here was yet another story, of romance born in the very shadow of the scaffold. Very carefully I schooled Mancini and his pretty bride-to-be to keep the whole thing secret from any outsiders. They did, so successfully that not even the Registrar at Wandsworth who made them man and wife, realised that the Toni England whom he was marrying was the man who not long before had faced a charge of murder.

To make quite sure that no other paper got any line on the story I acted as "best man" to Toni when the ceremony took place, Billy Field, one of our photographers, "giving the bride away". Thus we secured not only an exclusive story of Toni

Mancini's marriage, but a photograph of the pair as they left the Registrar's Office, bride and bridegroom.

'So what?' you may say, and I can only answer that this is an instance of what I was prepared to do to keep a story to myself. There were some things I jibbed at however, notably falling in with a suggestion made to me by Pierre Vaquier the poisoner.

In my experience murderers are invariably possessed of a streak of vanity. There appears to be something in their make-up which enables them almost to revel in the limelight focused upon them as central figures in a murder drama, even though the gallows looms ahead in the near distance.

Pierre Vaquier, who was hanged for the murder of Alfred Jones, the licensee of the Blue Anchor Hotel, at Byfleet, Surrey, was such a murderer. The murder was a crime of jealousy rather than one of passion, and from beginning to end the story took only six months in the telling. It was on 6th January, 1924, that Vaquier met Mrs. Jones, the wife of the victim, and became obsessed with an ungovernable passion for her. It was on 6th July of the same year that he was sentenced to death for poisoning the husband of the woman he coveted, by administering strichnine.

Mrs. Jones was on holiday in a modest little hotel in Biarritz when Vaquier, with that impressive courtesy which was one of his characteristics, made her acquaintance. Neither of them could speak the other's language, but by means of an English-French dictionary, they managed to make themselves understood to one another.

Mrs. Jones returned to Byfleet to take up her duties as hostess at her husband's hotel. Almost immediately Vaquier turned up at the hotel, where he explained that he had come over to exploit the patent of a sausage machine which he had invented. He proposed to make the Blue Anchor Hotel his headquarters, he said, and having run short of money, borrowed £14 in all.

It happened that on the day before Vaquier's arrival at the hotel, Mr. Jones decided to take a holiday at Margate. As to life at the hotel after the Frenchman's arrival, and before the murder brought us to the scene, I am able to throw some light as I,

together with many other Pressmen, practically lived at the Blue Anchor Hotel, where Vaquier continued to stay after the death of Jones.

It was from George Whitewick, the manager of the hotel, that I learned something of Vaquier's dog-like devotion to the pretty dark-haired woman into whose life he was to bring such grim tragedy.

Speaking of this, Mr. Whitewick told me: 'Vquier—whom I used to call Poincaré, whilst he retaliated by calling me Lloyd George—never left her side if it was at all possible to be with her. He followed her everywhere she went, never seemed happy while she was away from him, and could not bear to be parted from her for even a few minutes.

'He had the free run of the house and was in the habit of getting up early, making himself a cup of coffee and either sitting about until the rest of the household was up, or going for a walk by himself. But when he did the latter he was always back in time to meet Mrs. Jones as she came downstairs.

'Then for the rest of the day he was her shadow. They sat around talking to each other with the aid of a dictionary, and usually took meals together. If Mrs. Jones was called away for a few moments the Frenchman was disconsolate and spent the time wandering about like a dog that has lost its master.'

At this time the husband was at Margate on holiday, and he was taken ill there.

On his return, Mr. Jones was so ill that he had to go straight to bed, and Mrs. Jones waited on him hand and foot. The Frenchman too was also very attentive to the sick man.

He sat by the side of the bed and tried to keep Jones cheerful. He ran the Wireless up into the sick room so that Jones might have something to keep him interested when there was no one there for him to talk to.

But this display of affection for Mr. Jones did not lessen the Frenchman's attentiveness to the sick man's wife. He tried to keep her downstairs as often as possible, and was always as close to her as her own shadow.

It was the same after Jones got better and was on his feet again. Vaquier was always friendliness itself, but he made no attempt to hide his infatuation for Mrs. Jones, even when he saw that her husband was beginning to object. And he *did* show that.

Sometimes the husband would rise from the table at which he and his wife were sitting with Vaquier, and leave the room in obvious ill-humour. Vaquier never went into the bar, but would peep through the curtains and make motions to the wife if she were there, to intimate that he wanted to speak to her.

So that one gets an idea of the Frenchman's persistent pursuit of Mrs. Jones, which she was most anxious to avoid, and endeavoured to do so by every means possible. But Vaquier was not to be shaken off so easily. There were many cheery parties at the Blue Anchor in those days before the husband died, in which Vaquier joined, his eyes always upon the proprietress.

His usual drink was rum and coffee or a small glass of red wine, and although he smilingly resisted all efforts made to get him drunk, he never refused to drink while he was in the party, and was most punctilious in standing his round in turn.

He was subjected to a good deal of chaff, but when he could understand what was said to him he was quite capable of keeping his end up in that direction. In fact the crowd regarded him rather affectionately, and soon after Jones first got up, they made several efforts to persuade Vaquier to go out on a 'rough night' with them.

He went, but stuck religiously to his own drinks, and came back quite sober.

Meanwhile the canker of jealousy was eating into Vaquier's soul. He wanted Mrs. Jones and Alfred Jones stood in the way. It was about this time that he went up to a chemist in London, with whom he had dealt before, and who spoke fluent French. From him he obtained sufficient strychnine to kill four people, explaining that he wanted it for 'wireless experiments'.

As was shown at the trial, however, no wireless expert had ever heard of this particular poison being used in connection with wireless, nor could Vaquier explain its uses in this respect.

On 28th March, there was a dance at the Blue Anchor Hotel, and that night Vaquier retired early to bed. Now it must be said that Jones was rather partial to his liquor, and, to combat a possible hangover, always kept by him a bottle of bromo-seltzer, a dose of which he took with unfailing regularity in the morning. When he awoke on the morning of the 29th, Jones had a bad head. He went downstairs about seven, to find Vaquier was up before him. The Frenchman was standing just by the shelf where the bromo-seltzer was kept.

Jones took a stiff dose from the bottle just as his wife appeared on the scene, and almost immediately became violently sick. Vaquier was looking on. The wife put him to bed and gave him an emetic. She sent for the doctor, putting the bottle of bromo-seltzer in the drawer of the kitchen table just as it was.

• Vaquier, for what reason can well be imagined in the light of subsequent events, took the bottle from the drawer, carefully scoured it, and replaced it as before. By that time Mr. Jones was dead.

It is at this point of the story—after the death of Jones, that a score of reporters including myself came on the scene. At that time we knew nothing of the actual circumstances, beyond the fact that it was a case of suspected poisoning. But very soon we realised that here was a crime of passion, with the squat bearded figure of the Frenchman playing a prominent part.

He was obviously passionately in love with Mrs. Jones. As much in love with her as she was distant with him. We noticed that she avoided him on every occasion, and treated him with the utmost coolness.

As for Vaquier his distress was almost comic. He hovered about her, pleading with her on every possible occasion and doing everything to regain his old place in her affections—but she would have none of him. And knowing that even then she believed him to be her husband's murderer, that can occasion no surprise.

After a time he began to seek company elsewhere, but there was no one in the place who would have anything to do with

him. He then took to his bed and seemed to be so desperately ill that George Whitewick and his wife waited on him. But Vaquier refused food, and gradually became worse until he sank into what appeared to be a state of coma.

More than once during those days of police inquiries, I slipped up into his bedroom to have a chat with him, but he would turn his face away, and pretend to be unconscious. Yet I knew he was not, for if he heard footsteps coming up the stairs one could see him become alert, almost expectant. He was listening for the footsteps of the woman for whom he was continually asking.

‘Mabs—’ he would moan, and then beg that ‘Mabs’, as he called Mrs. Jones, would come to him. Steadfastly she refused however, until George Whitewick went to her one day and told her he thought Vaquier was dying. Mrs. Jones then went to Vaquier’s room and quietly entered. I stood at the open door.

He was lying quite still when she went in, looking absolutely ghastly; so ghastly in fact that I believed, and the widow also believed that he was dying.

At all events she suddenly unbent, and going to the side of the bed called to him, ‘Pierre, Pierre, I’m here.’

‘Mabs . . . come on,’ he answered. At that he rose up like a shot, and I cannot help thinking now that his illness was a subterfuge by means of which he hoped to win Mrs. Jones’s sympathy once more.

But it did not do him much good, for as soon as she saw the change in him she went from the room.

A doctor was called and he declared that there was little the matter with the Frenchman, who realising he had nothing to gain by remaining in bed was soon up and about again. After that Mrs. Jones would have nothing to do with him. By this time it was so clear to everyone there that he had had some hand in the death of Jones, there was a distinctly unfriendly feeling towards him. So much so, that he left the Blue Anchor to take a room in another hotel.

Like the police, we never left him. The hotel where he stayed was just opposite the police station which had been made a

repository for all Vaquier's belongings. If he required anything he had to walk across to the police station for it. This amused him immensely and seemed to appeal to his vanity. By this time suspicion was strong against him, and as he himself told me, 'I am under what we call in France open arrest. Everywhere the police follow me. I know.'

And it was quite true. We all knew that it was only a matter of time, and that they were simply waiting until they had discovered where Vaquier obtained the strychnine before they placed him under arrest. And it was his inordinate vanity which provided them with the necessary information.

Vaquier loved to pose for the press photographers, and it was one of their pictures which caught the eye of the chemist who had sold him the strychnine, which Vaquier had signed for in the name of 'Wanker' by the way, and he immediately informed the police. So the vital link in the chain was forged, and Vaquier was arrested.

On the day before, I had been talking with him outside the hotel, when he said to me: 'They will take me to-morrow—yes—I know it.'

'What on earth makes you think that?' I asked.

'They have found that I bought poison—yes, they will take me to-morrow.'

He was right. Prior to this, however, I knew full well how strongly he was suspected and also that he had already worked out in his mind a subtle yet childish scheme whereby he thought he would escape. He confided this to me one evening after we had been chatting together, and after I had been sounding him as regards his life story. All the time he was protesting his innocence.

The scheme he had in view, and which he put up quite seriously, was this. I was to buy his life story at a very big price and then, having arranged the terms, a high-speed car was to be provided. He was to go for a long walk—knowing full well that detectives were following him within easy reach. The car was to follow, and as it passed him he was to leap in as it slowed down for a moment, and then away.

At some point farther along, another car was to be in readiness, a rapid change over was to be made, and he was to be driven back to London, where he would shave off his beard and moustache, disguise himself in other ways, and then remain in hiding in London. In the meantime I was to employ some trustworthy person to take letters, which he himself would write, over to different places in France where they would be posted.

In the meantime he would be writing his amazing life story, whilst the police would be scouring France following up these false clues.

Of course, I had to point out to him that I could not possibly do this. I also suggested tactfully that if he were innocent it was much better to face the whole thing and have his innocence proved to the world. I am afraid that he was annoyed at my lack of imagination in not leaping at his offer and must have loathed my lack of perspicacity. I believe he approached some of the other Pressmen afterwards, but we were none of us biting.

Evidently Vaquier bore no malice, for the following evening he entered the coffee-room of the Railway Hotel, Woking, where he had for days been more or less a prisoner, never stirring unless followed at a discreet distance by detectives, and beamed a genial greeting to the assembled company.

Those of us who had been on the job from the beginning knew that an arrest was imminent. It was just a matter of waiting for it. And, as I have already mentioned, Vaquier also knew that his apprehension was likely at any moment. Yet he imagined in his artless rather childish mind that the crime would never be brought home to him.

We were all there, expectant and alert, ready for any development. At the piano sat a woman guest, her fingers idly strumming out some of the latest popular tunes while we hummed them. Vaquier went over and laid his broad-brimmed black hat on the piano and sat down. The pianist began to play some French airs and the Frenchman threw back his head and sat there with his eyes closed while he listened.

Suddenly there appeared in the doorway of the smoking-room

the burly figure of the late Superintendent Boshier, chief of the Woking police. In a moment the homely atmosphere of that room became tense with drama. The hands of the pianist dropped from the keyboard. The humming ceased and a dead silence prevailed. Vaquier opened his eyes and saw the Superintendent whom he knew well.

The police officer spoke no word. Simply lifted a beckoning finger to the Frenchman who rose to his feet. He hunched his shoulders and with outspread hands inquired, '*Pour moi, m'sieur?*'

Superintendent Boshier nodded. He spoke no word. Again that grim portentous silence. Vaquier swept up his large black hat from the piano and with a courtly bow to the company and a word of thanks to the lady pianist passed through the door on his way to the scaffold.

Such was the arrest of one of the vainest, suavest and most guileless poisoners I have ever encountered.

During the period that he was awaiting trial, his vanity and self-possession never deserted him.

One of the treasures in his prison cell was the bill of fare of his first meal at Brixton Prison. Another was the little round disc bearing his cell number, which was stitched to his clothing.

'These,' he said to a friend who visited him, 'I shall take back to France with me after I have been proved not guilty.'

One of the reasons why he took such voluminous notes on the ledge of the dock at Woking Police Court, wearing out pencils and filling quires of blue foolscap paper, was that he intended to sell his memoirs, and thus give himself a fresh start. He took down the evidence as it was translated to him in French, and after the sentences he would bracket his impressions and feelings.

He could never understand why it was that the magistrates at Woking Police Court did not bully and accuse him as they do in France. He felt that he was being cheated of something.

Vaquier was deaf in one ear, and while he was under remand he asked if he could have a patent apparatus to help him hear M. le Président—Mr. Justice Avory—and when he was told that it would cost some guineas he suggested that the makers might send

it to him on approval as it were, so that he could wear it for the trial and return it afterwards. Their reward would be the advertisement they would get out of the matter.

He was so quiet and courteous at Brixton that they regarded him there as a model prisoner.

Over and over again he expressed his thanks to the prison officers for small services and their general treatment, but it was never necessary to be harsh with him.

He prided himself on his deportment, and he was proud of his clothing and his toilet. He was constantly brushing his suit. In prison he kept up his previous habit of carrying a comb so that he could dress his heavy beard frequently; and he was so particular about that adornment he ordered a special sort of violet-scented brilliantine for it.

The trial of Vaquier was very dreary and lacking in drama owing to the fact that every word of the evidence had to be translated for him word by word.

No one regretted this lack more than Vaquier himself, for he afterwards said that he did not like the necessity for his silence. He would have preferred M. le Président, as he always called the judge, to have violently attacked him as was done in France.

He felt that he was not figuring so prominently as he should do, and it hurt his vanity. He would have liked voluble eloquence, and wild gesticulation, with himself taking the chief part in the harangues, instead of which he had to sit there patiently listening, and uttering no word himself.

Not till the moment when the jury returned their verdict or 'Guilty', and sentence of death was passed, was there that drama which one expects.

Before uttering the grim formula of the death sentence, the judge directed the interpreter to ask Vaquier if he had anything to say.

Vaquier pulled out a piece of blue paper upon which was scribbled some words he had written whilst awaiting the verdict. He commenced to read aloud from these notes, but again was interrupted and told that he could only give any reason in law why sentence should not be passed upon him.

He shrugged his shoulders, smiled that same sardonic smile and said in French: 'I am innocent.'

Phrase by phrase the words of the death sentence were translated to him. Then came the dramatic climax. In a torrent of words, accompanied by violent gesticulation, he shouted: 'Gentlemen, you have given an iniquitous verdict.'

'Let the prisoner be removed,' ordered the stern voice of the judge, but as the warders closed in upon him, Vaquier pushed them aside, and flung at the jurors: 'I swear on the new-made grave of my mother and father that I am innocent.'

His voice rose to a shriek as he mouthed and raged in the dock, resisting all efforts of the officers to remove him. 'All the witnesses in this case have been liars,' and then, still shaking his fists at the jury as he was rushed towards the steps leading to the cells below, he cried: 'I shall defend myself—I have been sold.'

Incoherent shouts could be heard coming from below. He had lost all control, and was calling down curses upon everyone in connection with the case.

This time he was taken back to Wandsworth Prison there to await his execution. And it was here by strange coincidence that Patrick Mahon was also lying under sentence of death, for the cruel murder of Emily Kaye at the bungalow on the Crumbles at Eastbourne.

Both of them were dandies in the way of clothes and appearance, but totally different in psychology. Vaquier excited, nervously alert, and still imbued with a feeling that the French lawyer Maître Odin, who had come over to see what could be done, would be able to work some miracle; and Mahon, depressed, sullen and despondent.

They each knew that the other was there, and from time to time made inquiries about each other, but without getting any replies.

One last glimpse of Vaquier as I saw him, this time at the Court of Criminal Appeal where, before the Lord Chief Justice and two other judges, he listened intently—although he could understand scarcely one word that was uttered—to the final plea of his

counsel urging the grounds on which they claimed he should not be hanged.

It was a hopeless effort. Whilst the arguments were proceeding, he stood quiet and calm. But when at length the judgment of the court was translated, he became transformed into a raging fury.

His strong hands gripped the dock like a vice. He screamed a tirade in French, foam coming from his mouth in the frenzy of his protest and lodging on his beard.

Three warders seized him, they unloosed his fingers from the iron rails which he clasped, and whilst he still struggled and mouthed his rage, he was hustled through the green baize curtains which are the one bit of colour—other than the robes of the judges—which enliven this drab chamber where so many last hopes are doomed.

## *The Poisoned Sandwich Case*

IT WAS during his closing speech at the trial of Mrs. Sarah Annie Hearn on a charge of double murder that Mr. Norman Birkett, K.C., brought home to those present in the Assize court at Bodmin how easy it is for any one of us to do the wrong thing at a time of crisis.

'If only people did the right thing in life and all the circumstances of life,' he said, 'the lawyer's occupation would be gone.'

How very true, and how often have I seen this trite fact borne out at trial after trial, when some person has committed a foolish or thoughtless act which has aroused suspicion and brought trouble in its train. But never more so than in the case of Mrs. Sarah Annie Hearn.

When Mr. Birkett made his remark during one of the most eloquent and analytical closing speeches of his career, he was referring to one of the 'circumstances' which had led to the appearance of Mrs. Hearn in the dock at Bodmin, there to be tried for her life. It was a 'circumstance' destined to foster the unfounded suspicion that she had deliberately poisoned her friend Mrs. Alice Thomas, a hue-and-cry being raised after her throughout the country. Mrs. Thomas died from arsenical poisoning on 4th November, 1930.

But let me explain how I came into the story. In the early November of 1930, one of our local reporters rang me up from Launceston, Cornwall, to say that a Mrs. Hearn had vanished from her home, Trenhorne House in the village of Lewannick just outside Launceston, and that her hat and coat had been found on the cliffs at Looe. In the ordinary course of events, the simple fact of a disappearance would have occasioned little interest, and would have been dismissed with a laconic, 'Oh—suicide'.

There was something more than a mere disappearance in this case however, as our correspondent pointed out; for, on the morning that she vanished, Mrs. Hearn wrote a letter to Mr. Thomas, the farmer husband of the deceased woman, in which she intimated that she intended to take her life because of *something that had been said at the funeral of Mrs. Thomas*. The following is what Mrs. Hearn wrote: 'Good-bye, I am going out if I can, I cannot forget that awful man and the things he said, I am innocent—innocent. She is dead and it was my lunch she ate. I cannot bear it. When I am dead they will be sure I am guilty and you, at least, will be clear. May your dear wife's presence guard and comfort you still. My conscience is clear so I am not afraid of the afterwards.'

The letter then went on—'My life isn't a great thing anyhow, now dear Minnie's gone . . .'

Minnie was her sister who had died in July only a month or two before the death of Mrs. Thomas. The 'things' which had been said at the funeral were words uttered by a Mr. Parsons, brother of Mrs. Thomas, who said that his sister's death 'must be cleared up', and remarked, "'Tis that woman', indicating Mrs. Hearn.

A day later, according to our correspondent, Mr. Thomas himself told Mrs. Hearn that people were talking about poison in connection with the death of his wife, and used words to the effect, '*They will blame one of us . . . and the blame will come heavier on you than on me*'.

This latter information given over the telephone by our local man put an entirely different complexion on the disappearance of Mrs. Hearn. It appeared on the face of it that these remarks had so preyed on the mind of the missing woman that she decided to take her life.

Was she guilty or innocent? That was the question. There was only one way of finding out. Once more I seized my suitcase, kept ever handy at the office, and made for Launceston.

I put up at the White Hart Hotel which lies beneath the very shadow of the ruins of Launceston Castle, perched high upon a

hill. Then I followed my customary opening move—mingled with the people in the bar, listened to their conversation to get a line on what they were thinking and saying about the drama in their midst.

There was no doubt about it, the people of Launceston were convinced that Mrs. Hearn was responsible for the death of her friend Alice Thomas and that when she knew inquiries were being made into the mystery, she had become scared and fled the scene. It was even bruited around that there was some romantic attachment between the missing woman and Mr. Thomas. A suggestion in which there was not a vestige of truth.

But the tongue of scandal is always ready to wag, especially where a woman is concerned.

Having gained a bit of background I set out on my inquiries into the facts. I went out to Lewannick and saw the cottage where Mrs. Hearn (Annie, as she was generally called) had lived with her sister Bessie, 'a couple of gunshots from the farm where the Thomas's lived' as one person put it. Mrs. Hearn was in her middle forties, and both she and her sister became very friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, exchanging visits, going drives and enjoying picnics together.

On 18th October, 1930 (after Bessie's death) Mrs. Thomas suggested that her husband should invite Mrs. Hearn to drive into Bude with them. He did so and the party set off just as they had done on innumerable other occasions. Sometimes Mrs. Thomas would provide food for the party, at other times Mrs. Hearn would take the necessary. On 18th October, Mrs. Hearn prepared some salmon sandwiches, and a chocolate cake. A simple enough meal, but one which was destined to cause an innocent woman to be suspect of murder.

At tea-time that afternoon, the Thomas's with Mrs. Hearn entered Littlejohn's Café, Bude, to have some tea. Mrs. Hearn produced the salmon sandwiches wrapped in a serviette, and placed them openly upon the table within reach of all to take as they pleased. They *all* ate of them.

On the journey home Mrs. Thomas was taken ill with violent

vomiting. The others were *not* ill. On arrival home Mrs. Thomas asked Mrs. Hearn to remain with her as she felt so ill and a doctor was summoned. For a fortnight Mrs. Hearn remained at the farm, nursing her friend with every care and devotion, as was testified by everyone who saw her there. The ailing woman began to make some progress, and Mrs. Hearn returned to her cottage leaving the nursing of Mrs. Thomas to Mrs. Parsons the sick woman's mother. On 2nd November, there was another attack of vomiting. The following day there was a relapse and at 1.30 a.m. on 4th November, Mrs. Thomas was whisked off to hospital at Plymouth where she died some eight hours later—from arsenical poisoning it transpired.

This was the story I managed to pick up during my early inquiries, and, on the face of it and in view of all the circumstances, things certainly looked black against Mrs. Hearn. Her disappearance, her letter to Mr. Thomas, and the fact that Mrs. Thomas had become ill so soon after eating the salmon sandwiches which Mrs. Hearn had provided, all seemed to point to her guilt.

The inquest upon the dead woman was held and an open verdict returned. A countryside search for Mrs. Hearn ensued, for the police were not satisfied that she had taken her life as suggested in the letter. One newspaper offered a reward of £500 for any information leading to the discovery of her whereabouts. But nothing came of it. Days and weeks went by. I slipped up to Doncaster to interview Mrs. Poskitt, a sister of the missing woman. She was convinced that her sister was incapable of committing so cruel a crime.

But the police were pursuing their investigations and there came another sensation! In the dead of a December night the bodies of Bessie Everard (Mrs. Hearn's sister) and of her Aunt Mary Ann Everard were exhumed from the Lewannick graveyard on a Home Office order. The organs of Mrs. Thomas were already being examined by Home Office experts, and now those of the two exhumed bodies were submitted to the same pathological analysis. Arsenic was found in both!

The story was certainly building up into a first-class poisoning mystery. But until the death of Annie Hearn was established or she was found to be living, it seemed likely to fizzle out like a spent firework. On the other hand, if she *were* found, then it was going to be one of the most sensational stories I had ever been engaged upon. But this seemed unlikely.

Seven weeks went by. Seven weeks during which rumours and reports that Mrs. Hearn had been seen here or seen there, came rolling in only to prove unfounded. And then—towards the middle of January, 1931, Sergeant Trebilcock of Launceston was sent to Torquay in response to information that Mrs. Hearn had been seen there. He recognised the missing woman walking along a street there and challenged her. She admitted her identity.

The hunt was over! Mrs. Hearn was arrested, taken back to Launceston and charged with the double murder of Mrs. Thomas and her own sister Bessie. Owing to the lapse of time and the condition of the coffin it was impossible to say how the aunt had died.

The arrest of Mrs. Hearn was the signal for me to get cracking. My natural inclination was to do as I knew other crime reporters from every Fleet Street office were doing—race off to Launceston where Mrs. Hearn would be brought up at the police court. But I knew that this would be purely a formal hearing, with the central figure appearing for only a few minutes in the dock while the charge was read over to her. On the other hand my mind was obsessed with the feeling that here was a first-class poisoning case with its central figure a woman who had vanished for months and would now have to face a trial for murder.

Instead of going south I went north to Doncaster to call upon Mrs. Poskitt once more. I pointed out to her the grave position in which her sister would be unless adequately defended during the proceedings which must necessarily follow. I explained that we were prepared to provide such defence from that moment onward in return for the exclusive story of her sister. If necessary I would put her (Mrs. Poskitt) in touch with a solicitor whom she could instruct to defend her sister, and so on and so on.

Fortunately for everyone concerned, there was a solicitor at Grimsby who had acted for the Everard family for some years and was a friend as well as legal adviser. This was Mr. Walter West, one of the most resourceful solicitors it has ever been my lot to meet. He came over right away and the whole matter was sealed and settled within twenty-four hours of Mrs. Hearn's arrest. I had got her story. And it was just as well that I had followed my hunch to go to Doncaster, for it was not long before other crime men were in the field with the same object in view.

During the police court proceedings which followed I travelled to Launceston with Mr. West on several occasions, and, without vanity, think I can claim to have been of some assistance to him on account of my very wide experience of arsenical poisoning cases. On the way down we would discuss the line of questioning he might follow especially with regard to the expert witnesses whose evidence was of paramount importance. It was quite early on at the police court that I realised how the trial of Mrs. Hearn would ultimately revolve around the infinitesimal amounts of arsenic found in the bodies of her alleged victims. Quantities so microscopic as to cause the imagination of the lay mind to boggle at their mention.

For example during the evidence of Dr. Roche Lynch, the Home Office analyst who has figured in so many poison trials, he talked glibly of the presence of arsenic in such proportions as 0.01 parts per 1 million. In examining the hair from the head of Minnie Everard, he had found 16 parts per 1 million, while in her finger nails were 40 parts per 1 million.

Yet another thing impinged upon my mind during the evidence of Dr. Roche Lynch. He was describing the experiments he had carried out to test the amount of arsenic in the soil taken from around the coffin of Bessie Everard. The witness described how he had taken a tube and filled it with twelve inches of soil from around the coffin. He then allowed water to percolate through this tube *five times*. The total amount of arsenic found in the water after this test was, he suggested, *equivalent to the water having passed through five feet of earth*, the amount above the coffin.

I scribbled a hurried note on my pad, and, from my Press seat, passed it to Mr. West. Leisurely he rose to cross-examine the expert. He elicited the obvious fact that at the first percolation of water through the tube some of the arsenic must have been washed from the soil, and that at each succeeding percolation the soil would become weaker in arsenical deposits, and would *not* therefore be equivalent to water passing through five feet of fresh earth. A point with which the analyst was bound to agree.

•You will appreciate how important was this fact when I tell you that the proportion of arsenious oxide in that soil was 240 times the amount found in any of the dead woman's organs, eight times the total amount found in her body altogether, and fifty times the amount found in her nails.

Again, during the evidence of Dr. Roche Lynch at the police court I heard him state not without some emphasis that he had no doubt whatever that the cause of Mrs. Thomas's illness on the way back from Bude on 18th October, was the salmon sandwich she had eaten that day. He declared that at least ten grains of arsenic must have been contained in that sandwich, which meant that at least fourteen grains of the weedkiller supposed to have been used, had been sprinkled on it. The other four grains, consisting of other chemicals, he stated, included *a fair percentage of dye*.

Now Dr. Roche Lynch had carried out a number of experiments with weedkiller, and produced the results in little bottles and test-tubes. He showed how a few grains of weedkiller would *so discolour Benger's food as to make it distinctly noticeable*.

He described how he had placed a little over a grain of a certain kind of soda used in the weedkiller on a salmon sandwich, to see whether it would taste or not. He had, in fact, experimented with and analysed almost everything, *giving the results in fractional parts of a million*.

It was when I heard of the infinitesimal quantities he was dealing with, and when, as the result of my inquiries in the neighbourhood, I learned certain facts concerning the local soil, that I first realised the possibility of Annie Hearn's innocence.

With regard to the death of Minnie Everard, Dr. Roche Lynch

was just as emphatic that she also had died from arsenical poisoning administered over a long period—at least seven months—the poison having been found in every organ of her body together with the skin, the hair and finger-nails.

This meant that if Annie Hearn were in fact a murderer she had sat beside her ailing sister day after day, night after night, watching with pitiless eyes her violent agony as death crept ever closer.

Now I had been in the company of Bessie Poskitt throughout the police court proceedings, and had learned much about the character of her sister. From what she told me I formed the opinion that Annie Hearn could never have murdered Minnie even if she were guilty of poisoning Mrs. Thomas—which I did not think she was.

It was at this point that I began to look around for some more innocent source of the poison which had killed Minnie Everard.

I told Walter West my feelings in the matter. He had handled the case so brilliantly during the police court hearings, and had elicited so many important points during his cross-examination of the various witnesses, that I felt he might be able to help me in the inquiry I intended to embark upon.

Meanwhile he had received several letters from people in the Launceston area. One man—an expert—wrote pointing out that within a mile of Mrs. Hearn's house was an old disused mine which had yielded scores of tons of crude arsenicum in the past, and that the soil was rich in all sorts of arsenious deposits. Another man who had lived in the house before Mrs. Hearn wrote saying that some of the guests had complained of the water supply which came from an open spring about a hundred yards away.

I thought around this problem for a time, and decided to put certain theories to the test. With Mr. West, I went out to the house of Mrs. Hearn with a supply of sterilised bottles. Funnily enough, our visit coincided with a visit by Mr. Patrick Devlin—now Mr. Justice Devlin—counsel for the Crown, and Superintendent Pill, of the local police.

The Superintendent was a kind soul, and even helped me fill one of the bottles from the tap which supplied the house. Then I

went out to the spring, and by taking off my coat and lying down flat on my stomach, I was able to get some water and also to get a sample of mud from the bottom of the well, all of which I carefully sealed in the sterilised bottles.

I afterwards had these analysed, and the result was that arsenic was found in every sample taken. That satisfied me that here was a possible natural source of the infinitesimal amounts of arsenic to be found in the organs of Miss Everard.

For years she had suffered from gastric and other stomach troubles. For seven years, on and off, the doctors around Launceston and Lewannick had attended her for these complaints, and for twenty years before that she had been continuously ill with the same trouble. Naturally, her impaired digestive organs could not eliminate the poison which found its way into her body through the ordinary drinking water, and so there was this accumulation—minute as it was—of arsenic in the hair and nails and skin.

That was the conclusion I came to on receiving the results of this private analysis. But there was one other thing I did. I entered the local barber's shop for a hair cut, and after the operation was complete took up a handful of hair which had been cut from the heads of residents in the district and which had been swept up into a corner of the room.

On analysis these sweepings were also found to contain arsenic to the amount of just over 2 parts per 1 million.

Naturally I kept Mr. West informed of the results of my inquiries and he in turn took me into his confidence regarding a diary which had been left behind by Minnie Everard, and was at that time in the hands of the prosecution. He naturally had a complete copy of the diary, and if ever a document proved the innocence of Mrs. Hearn so far as her sister was concerned, it was this voice from the grave. It contained scores of tributes to the loving care with which 'Annie' had nursed the woman whom she was accused of sending to a painful and lingering death.

A glance at the following extracts will tell the story.

'Annie got out at 3 a.m. and got me some hot water. Awake several hours. She did not sleep very well.'

'Annie does not seem very well. It is trying for her. Bad nights and all anxiety.'

'Annie is looking pale and tired. At 5.30 she got up and got me some hot water.'

'At 3.30 a.m. Annie got me a poultice. Oh, it was a long, long night for us both.'

I became more convinced than ever of the innocence of Mrs. Hearn regarding the death of her sister, and now turned my attention to the death of Mrs. Thomas. I had been present all through the police court hearings and to refresh my memory proceeded to read copies of all the depositions together with my own notes of the proceedings.

I recalled how Dr. Roche Lynch had stated that every tin of weedkiller contained 'a fair percentage of dye'. This is a very proper precautionary measure to indicate the presence of poison. A fortunate precaution for Mrs. Hearn, as it turned out.

The famous analyst, you will remember, declared that at least fourteen grains of weedkiller containing some ten grains of arsenic had been administered in the salmon sandwich eaten on 18th October. This was what I proposed to test with the aid of Mr. West. It was he who ultimately carried out the experiment which was to prove my theory correct.

You will remember that the sandwiches were wrapped up in a serviette and laid *quite openly* upon the café table. This was the evidence of the waitress who served the party, and of Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Hearn herself. They were there visible to the eye of the waitress and any other person who chanced to enter the café.

I had been intrigued by the fact that a few grains of the weedkiller had discoloured the patent food. It struck me that as salmon was moist, the dye contained in the chemical would most likely discolour the sandwich. Mr. West obtained a tin of the same weedkiller referred to in evidence. He had fourteen grains measured out by a local chemist, and then got some salmon and bread.

Mr. West casually asked Mrs. Hearn the sort of loaf she had used, and the thickness of the slices cut from it and then cut the

bread to the thickness stated. The weedkiller was sprinkled on the salmon as it lay between the two slices of bread and butter.

In less than three minutes the dye had stained the bread so blue that it looked for all the world like a piece of badly mottled Gorgonzola cheese. In a few more minutes, the bread was literally blue all over.

*And the sandwiches which Mrs. Hearn had laid out on that restaurant table had according to the evidence been carried about packed close together in a package, for two solid hours. Had there been any weedkiller at all in that sandwich—there could have been none in any except that eaten by Mrs. Thomas, for nobody else was ill—when the package was opened, it must have been so livid a blue that nobody except a blind person would have picked it out to eat, whilst it must have been seen by the waitress or Mr. Thomas who saw his wife take it.*

This much is certain. However Mrs. Thomas came by that fatal dose of arsenic, it was not from the sandwich supplied by Annie Hearn.

Of course, all these little points were useful to the defence when on 15th June, 1931, Mrs. Hearn came to trial. With the money provided by the *Empire News* Mr. West was able to engage the services of Mr. Norman Birkett, the then leading defence counsel at the Bar. I have watched the rise of Norman Birkett from his first murder case—when he gained an acquittal for his client—right up to his present proud position as a Lord Justice of Appeal. But never have I heard him more deadly in cross-examination, or more eloquent in his final speech, than at the trial of Mrs. Hearn.

I have noticed time and time again that he invariably opens his cross-examination with what I call a 'trap' question. I remember during the trial of Rouse of 'Burning Car Murder' fame, a certain witness gave expert evidence on the effect of heat on metals, the expansion of the union nut in Rouse's car and the fusing of the windscreen. He was a witness for the defence. Mr. Birkett appeared for the Crown. He rose quietly, hitched his gown about his shoulders and in his most ingratiating voice asked:

'What is the coefficient expansion of brass?'

The man looked blankly at the counsel, as well he might. I certainly had not the vaguest idea what it meant.

‘I am afraid I cannot answer that off-hand,’ he replied.

‘Do you know what it means?’

‘Put that way I probably do not.’

Birkett had made his point. It was a similar ‘trap’ question put to Dr. Roche Lynch in cross-examination at the Hearn trial, which to so great an extent robbed the expert’s evidence of its effect upon the jury.

You must remember that Dr. Roche Lynch had treated the court to a very learned and detailed exposition of the symptoms of arsenical poisoning in minute detail. He had described the onset of the violent vomiting even to giving a time at which the sickness might be expected to begin, following this up with a graphic description of the ensuing symptoms—the diarrhoea, tingling in the finger tips, and the peripheral neuritis (cramp). He had dealt with the minute amounts of arsenic found in the organs of Mrs. Thomas and had given his view as to the probable time before death, that the poison must have been administered to result in the symptoms described by the medical witnesses.

What the late Sir Bernard Spilsbury was in the realms of pathology, so is Dr. Roche Lynch in the realms of analysis. A witness of vast weight and authority.

Sitting beside Norman Birkett was Professor Sydney Smith, editor of that classic medical textbook *Taylor’s Medical Jurisprudence*, and Professor of Forensic Medicine at Edinburgh University. Doubtless it was he who primed Mr. Birkett in the finer medical points of arsenical poisoning and inspired his first question to Dr. Roche Lynch.

‘Have you ever examined a living patient suffering from arsenical poisoning?’ asked counsel, and the witness had to admit that he had not.

Counsel then turned to the 14.3 grains of weedkiller containing about ten grains of arsenic which the analyst stated must have been contained in the sandwich eaten by Mrs. Thomas. It was at this point that the little experiment which Walter West



*Above:* Mrs. Pace's cottage at Coleford. *Below:* Mrs. Pace.



had carried out assumed great importance as Mr. Birkett continued his questioning.

‘Have you taken a sandwich and put 14.3 grains upon it?’

‘No.’

‘You have shown that arsenic put in Benger’s Food discolours the white food?’

‘It changes the colour.’

‘That is with two grains?’

‘Yes.’

‘Seven times as much would greatly discolour it?’

‘Yes it would.’

And then a moment or two later, ‘The white bread like the white Benger’s food, would make the stains instantly discernible?’

‘I agree,’ came the answer, ‘and the white bread being more localised the blue would come through in spots or stains.’

The salmon sandwich was *out*.

Space forbids mention of all the drama concentrated into those nine days of trial at Bodmin Assizes. Yet it was not all tense drama. One evening after the day’s hearing was over George Munro of the *Daily Sketch*, and Con O’Leary and myself of *Kemsley Newspapers*, decided to row over from Padstow—where we were staying—across the mouth of the River Camel to a little place where Violet Lorraine was staying with her husband, Captain Joicey.

Neither Con nor myself were much of oarsmen, and it devolved upon George to pilot us across to the other shore. Both George and I knew Vi, and when she heard the story we were on, she expressed the wish to be present at the trial on the following day. There was no difficulty about this, and we arranged for her admission to the court where she looked upon a scene far more dramatic than any she had appeared in with dear old George Robey, her duettist in that vintage number, *If you were the only Girl in the World*.

On our return from the visit to Vi Lorraine, we found ourselves in a bit of a fix because the tide was out, and we could not get

right ashore. The three of us had to get out into about eighteen inches of water and haul the boat some fifty yards up the shelving beach before we could make her fast. My last memory of that night is of Con O'Leary standing in his bare feet in the lounge of the hotel, solemnly singing *The Wearing of the Green*.

One night just before the trial ended a party of us sought relaxation at Newquay where a concert party were the high spot of the entertainment provided by this Cornish beauty spot. We piled into the two cars of George Munro and Stanley Bishop of the *Daily Express*, and I can assure you that a good time was had by all. We went back-stage after the show, and were given a joyous welcome. The journey back was memorable for the clouds of steam which began to hiss forth from the radiator of Stan Bishop's car, which had sprung a leak. How we managed to overcome the trouble and get back to the hotel in the small hours of the morning, does not matter. The great thing is that we were not late for the court on the morrow.

To come to the last day of the trial I need only say that after the meticulous summing-up of Mr. Justice Roche, the jury were absent only fifty-two minutes before returning with their unanimous verdict, 'Not Guilty'.

As is customary when there is a double charge of murder against a person, the Crown only proceeded against Mrs. Hearn on that of murdering Mrs. Thomas. There still remained the charge of murdering her sister Minnie. On this count the prosecution took the usual course of offering no evidence, whereupon the judge instructed them to return a verdict of 'Not Guilty'.

This they did without retiring from the jury-box.

Mr. Justice Roche turned to the wilting figure in the dock, on whom all eyes were turned at this moment of happy relief.

'Sarah Ann Hearn,' he said, 'you are discharged.'

For a moment the black-clad figure hesitated not knowing what to do. A kindly wardress and nurse who had been in daily attendance throughout the trial gently took an arm apiece and led the prisoner to freedom—that freedom for which her counsel had so eloquently pleaded but a few hours before.

In that moment I sprang to life, for it was now that my real task began. I had got Mrs. Hearn's exclusive story. It was my job to see that no other Pressman got even a sniff of it. There must be no interviews with the representatives of any other newspapers. I knew what I was up against, and had already made certain preparations to get Mrs. Hearn away to a place where I alone should have access to her. Not *quite* alone let me say, for the plans I had made were with the co-operation of George Munro and Con O'Leary. As we were all three Kemsley men we combined efforts in the ruse by which we spirited Mrs. Hearn out of the danger zone.

I knew full well that the hounds of Fleet Street—bless them all—would be looking for me, so the only thing to do was to drag a red herring across the trail.

First of all I made my way to the little white-washed cell behind the courthouse. There I met Mrs. Hearn for the first time. Mrs. Poskitt was there and introduced me to her sister as the 'friend' she had spoken of. She and Bessie were clinging to each other in grateful joy at their reunion. A strange scene for such a happy event—the bare white-walled cell with just a table and two chairs therein. Only a matter of minutes before, she had sat in this same cell awaiting the verdict of a jury that meant life or death to her. Now—here she was, grave of mien, yet with tears of gladness in her eyes.

We chatted quietly for a moment while Mrs. Hearn smoked a cigarette. By this time George Munro and Con had arrived, George having brought into the courthouse yard his high-speed Salmonson tourer. We unfolded our plan to the two sisters.

They were to change hats and coats. They were not unlike in appearance, and the swap over of clothes would, we felt sure, add to the illusion. Then Mrs. Hearn in her sister's hat and coat, was to get into the Salmonson with George and await events.

Meanwhile I was to shepherd Mrs. Poskitt (in Mrs. Hearn's hat and coat) towards a door at one side of the yard where Walter West's car stood in readiness. Con in the meantime was to superintend the 'timing' of operations. As soon as he saw me

usher Mrs. 'Hearn' into Mr. West's car, he was to signal for the gates at the other side of the yard to be flung wide open. The moment this was done the Salmonson with (apparently) Mrs. Poskitt as passenger would streak through and make for Tavistock at a modest fifty miles or so an hour. We would all meet later at an agreed spot.

The two ladies entered into the spirit of the thing and the exchange of clothing was made. Everything went off beautifully just as we had arranged. Mr. West got clear away with Mrs. Poskitt trailed by the cars of other newspaper men until they realised the ruse which had been practised upon them. George Munro was by that time speeding through the countryside on his way to our rendezvous—which was Launceston. I felt sure that our rivals would never dream that we should make for so obvious a place.

Only Con and I were left to get away from the Assize Court as best we could and—without being followed. We kept our appointment all right but not without a bit of subterfuge. Several Pressmen without cars were still hanging about looking for me. I knew that if we dared hire a car they would have no difficulty in tracing us, so I compromised by persuading a laundryman who providentially called at the Court to collect some washing, to drive us to Launceston in his laundry van. In this we drove away, effectively screened by bundles of washing.

That night we doubled back on our tracks to a little place called Camelford between Bodmin and Padstow. We found a quiet hotel where the proprietor little knew that among his guests was Mrs. Hearn. The next day we took the train to London. On our way we passed through Exeter and I can recall even now—after over twenty years—the shudder that Annie Hearn gave as she looked up at the gaunt grey walls of the prison where she had spent so many months awaiting trial.

'Where would you like to go?' I asked her as we sped on our way. 'To your brother at Grimsby or back with Bessie to Doncaster?'

'We would like to spend a few days in London before going

home,' replied Mrs. Hearn, and this suited me down to the ground, for it would give me an opportunity of showing the sisters around while getting the story. In a modest hotel near King's Cross, Annie Hearn and Bessie Poskitt spent the next few days, and it was now that I got to know more about the character and nature of my charge.

I found her a most delightful companion. Quiet, intelligent, and with an intense fondness for all things beautiful.

'Now where would you like to go and what would you like to see?' I asked her, thinking perhaps that she might want to see Buckingham Palace or the Tower of London.

'The National Gallery,' was her reply, and on our arrival there I was amazed at the knowledge she revealed of painters and their works and of the technical phrases she used concerning the period and brushwork of the different pictures.

Again, during a visit to the Zoo at Regent's Park, she astonished me with her knowledge of the animals, their place of origin and habits. We 'did' a few theatres, had a dinner or two at various ~~West End~~ restaurants, and gradually I saw the greyness of sorrow which had shadowed the eyes of Annie Hearn, give place to an expression of content that the cloud which for so long enshrouded her, had passed over.

It was a different woman whom I saw off on the train when at length she went back to Doncaster with sister Bessie. And—as in the case of Mrs. Pace, for a year or two afterwards I received a Christmas card. I often wonder what has happened to her since those days.

## *'Jeanne of Arras'*

It is not only in the Old Bailey or at any one of our Assize Courts scattered about the country that one savours drama in its direst form. Many of the most poignant tragedies it has been my lot to delve into have found their setting in the sombre bareness of a Coroner's Court.

Let me take you into the court of Mr. Ingleby Oddie, where, in the witness-box, stands a tall slender figure with a wealth of, richly gleaming auburn hair from beneath which looked out two soulful eyes—eyes in which lurked the haunting sorrow of a great tragedy.

The figure is that of Jeanne Pignon, pouring out the story of her shattered romance, shattered in one brief moment by the sharp staccato report of a revolver.

Only a few minutes before that shot rang out, Jeanne had been talking to her soldier lover on the telephone and he had informed her of his grim intention to commit suicide.

In her pretty broken English with French accent—just as we heard it during the inquest proceedings—she begged her lover not to take his life.

'*Non—non*,' she had pleaded, 'wait—wait for me, my darling—I come home queek.'

But when she arrived the man she loved, Major Sydney Stewart, was lying dead in the little room they shared in Kensington Park Road, Bayswater.

Wife, mistress, gambling, drink, worry, a mystery woman, despair—and death. Those were the all too human elements that formed the background.

This was a drama of love, which called up all the colourful

background of the battlefields of France. It was in such a setting that Jeanne Pignon and Major Stewart first met at a time when the latter was Town Major of Arras, that town being occupied by British troops.

Jeanne was a telegraphist in the offices of the *Préfecture*, where, because of her great beauty, and popularity, she became known amongst the officers as 'Jeanne of Arras'.

It was a far call from the battle-scarred town of Arras to the prosaic Coroner's Court at Westminster where I first saw Jeanne Pignon. I saw her several times after that, and learned from her own lips the full story of her love for the major, but nothing could exceed in drama the scene in that crowded court as wife and mistress faced each other, the former a distinguished figure in her long black coat with small white stripes, and a rich grey fur over which hung the black weeds of widowhood.

And Jeanne—well, Jeanne was as French as could be in her slickly-cut navy-blue costume, skirt daringly short, with high laced boots and fur and muff.

It was the wife who first gave evidence, telling of the short period of happiness which followed her marriage to the dead man in those dark days of war in 1917. They had first met when he was in camp at Witley, she stated, and he went to the front in 1916.

They were married whilst the major was on leave, and he afterwards returned to France. It was then that he experienced 'a very bad time'. The Germans broke through, and for two weeks he was without sleep.

'He was never the same after that,' declared his widow in a sad voice. 'He was depressed, morose, and would sit for hours gazing at nothing.'

At length the war ended and her husband was demobilised. About a fortnight before the tragedy, he returned to this country, and they lived together for a day or two. Then—suddenly, he left the house and went away.

It is the duty of a Coroner to discover when possible, not merely the cause and place of death, but also the state of mind of

the deceased in a case of suicide. It was to this end that Mr. Oddie directed his first question.

'What reason did he give for going?' he asked Mrs. Stewart.

'He just said he was leaving,' was the reply.

'What was the real reason?'

'I think he was going to a French girl.'

There was an obvious reluctance to mention what must have been a painful matter, but very kindly was his tone, as the Coroner continued, 'What do you know about her?'

In a low voice the woman went on to say that her husband met this girl whom she herself only knew as 'Jeanne', in France. 'I had seen her when I was there,' she explained, and then went on: 'He told me that he had been living with her for a little while, but that it was just an interlude, and she had gone away, and it was finished. When he came home he told me she was in London, and so of course I found out that it was not finished.'

'He said that before he came over he had told the girl to go, but that she had come over with him after all.'

Again the voice of Mr. Oddie.

'Did he make out that he wanted to get rid of her?'

'He told me he had told her to go, but evidently she would not. I told him that if he would give up the girl, we would let bygones be bygones and start again. He said that was what he would like to do,' the witness added in a pathetic voice, 'but apparently it did not come off.' They had arranged to meet on the following Saturday, 'but of course he did not come,' the witness concluded sadly.

And all the while 'Jeanne of Arras' sat at the back of the court, gazing with sympathetic eyes at the woman in the witness-box, clutching her fur closely about her slim shoulders.'

There followed the widow into the box, the stalwart figure of Captain W. Rowan of the South African Army, who had met both the dead man and his mistress in France.

They had become very friendly, said the Captain, and at the time when he first met Stewart, he was practically living with the French girl. When he again met him in this country about

three weeks before the inquest, he found that Jeanne Pignon was still with the Major, and they were living together over here.

‘He told me that he intended to take her to South Africa,’ said the witness, ‘and I remarked, “What about Mrs. Stewart?”’ He explained that he and his wife did not get on very well together, and that he did not know what would happen to her. Later on he came to me and said, “I am in the soup. Mrs. Stewart has been to the War Office and complained about me living with a woman, and of having entered her name in a hotel register as Mrs. Stewart.” A short time afterwards he told me that his wife had instituted divorce proceedings against him.’

Mr. Oddie leaned across his desk, and addressing the widow asked her whether she had in fact instituted divorce proceedings.

‘No sir,’ was her quiet reply, and once more the Coroner turned to question Captain Rowan, who went on to say that he noticed that Major Stewart was drinking heavily at this time, and was also gambling a lot.

Coming to the day of the tragedy, the witness said that the Major had been along to a shipping company’s office to try and book a passage for Jeanne, but had been told that he could not get one for some time. ‘He begged me not to mention it to Jeanne, as she would be so upset about it,’ said Captain Rowan.

That night he again saw the Major with Jeanne, outside the Criterion. There was another girl present, and some ‘exciting conversation’ was in progress.

‘I stopped and said, “What’s the matter, Stewart?”’ and he replied, “Jeanne does not understand that if I speak to a girl it does not necessarily mean something wrong.” He was very drunk,’ added the witness.

‘What became of the unknown woman?’ asked Mr. Oddie.

‘She left the same time as I did, and Jeanne afterwards told me that she and the Major had gone to the Tube together, but that at one of the intermediate stations the Major must have got out.’

That was the end of the Captain’s evidence, and the name of Jeanne Pignon was then called. It was as though someone had

been bodily transferred from the Rue de Madeleine, as she made her way across the court, and in a low musical voice took the oath.

Slender of frame, and self-possessed, she told the story of her love for the handsome Englishman. There was neither shame nor abandon in the telling, and when she told the Coroner that she had first met the dead man in France, and had gone to live with him, it was apparent that she regarded it as the natural outcome of their love for each other.

‘Did you know he was married?’ asked Mr. Oddie.

‘Yes,’ was the unhesitating reply.

‘Did you ever see his wife?’

‘Yes, I saw her in Calais.’

It was said with the most delightful French accent, and in varying inflections of the voice. Unabashed, she went on to say that on that occasion (in Calais) the husband had dined with his wife at one hotel, and ‘came back to sleep with me at another’.

‘She was very vexed,’ the girl continued, ‘and he said that if I went away he would kill himself. He asked me to go to London with him, and got a passport for me, and wanted to take me to Africa.’

The words were pouring from her lips, and there was no holding anything back as she went on to tell of their arrival in London, their staying at various addresses, until they finally took the little room where her lover ended his life.

‘The War Office telephoned me to go there and see his wife,’ she said. ‘He stay away from his wife for a few days and then came to me and say he would stay with me. He say he ask his wife for divorce and marry me.

‘On Friday (the day of the tragedy) he had lunch with me, and we had tea in the Strand. During tea he said to me, “Jeanne, I leave you at 6.15 because I have an appointment for dinner with Monsieur Jackson.” I said “No—I go with you.” He said, “No, I will come home at 10.30. You go home.”’

With infinite understanding Mr. Oddie broke in with, ‘You did not believe in this Mr. Jackson?’

The witness smiled wanly.

'No—I no believe in him,' and then continued. 'At 6.35 we went to the Trocadero. He have several whiskies. I waited outside. We went to the Criterion, and I saw a lady call and talk to him. I not understand what she say, but I go over and I say to her, "Madam, I am sorry. I am Mrs. Stewart. If you have dinner with my husband, I go in with you too." She said, "I am sorry," and went away.'

\* The witness agreed that it was at this moment that Captain Rowan arrived on the scene, and asked what was the matter. After he and the woman had gone, the girl continued, 'I said to the Major, "Come home with me darling." We go to Piccadilly station, and he ask for two tickets. When I got to Oxford Circus, I could not see the Major.'

For a moment the torrent of words ceased as the agony of that dreadful moment came back to her. It seemed as though she re-lived the anguish she felt when she realised that her lover had deliberately duped her. One could almost feel the doubt arising in her love-crazed mind as she pictured how at that very moment perhaps, her man might be with another woman.

One could almost visualise the thoughts and emotions of this highly-strung woman, as she stood there pausing for a moment before words again came to her lips in which to tell the story of her anxious search for the man she loved.

'I go back to Piccadilly,' she explained, 'and the gateman on the lift tell me that the Major let me get in the train, and then gone back after the gates had closed. I went back to the Trocadero. He was not there. I went to the Monico, and could not find him. Then on to the Criterion. All the time I kept ringing up the house in Kensington Park Road, to see whether he had returned. I went to the Regents Palace. I sat there for a little while. By this time it was nearly ten o'clock. I was frantic—I telephoned to the house again, and he came to the telephone . . .'

Gone was her composure now. Gone that amazing self-possession. The moment of tragedy was close at hand, and the memory of it was all too vivid. Tears sprang to the beautiful

eyes. A trembling hand touched the red gold hair, and with a sob in her voice 'Jeanne of Arrás' continued: 'I could hear that he was crying. I spoke to him. He reply—"You no understand . . . I want to kill myself." I shout to him, "No—wait—wait. I come home queek—queek—queek." He say to me, "You will be too late," and I hear the telephone fall and the sound of a shot. I go quick to get a taxi-cab. I get home very soon. I open the door and rush into our room and there. I found him, dead. I threw my handbag and my muff on to the bed, and called to him. He did not answer. I rush to the telephone, and call for a doctor, and when I come back, my room is full of people.'

Her voice broke, and for the space of perhaps a second, which seemed an eternity at that moment, there was a hush over the court. Then Mr. Oddie took up the thread of the inquiry.

Did the Major appear to have plenty of money? Yes, and he had told the witness within the last few days that he 'had some money from the bookmakers for the racing horse'.

'Had he ever before threatened to kill himself?' was the next question.

'Yes—when we were at Rouen.

'Did you make scenes with him about another woman?'

'I saw him speak to another woman at Rouen. He was very sorry afterwards, and it was all right, but he threatened to kill himself then.'

'What sort of scene did you make? Did you kick or scratch him?'

The witness looked puzzled. She shrugged her shoulders and murmured apologetically, 'I not know scratch.'

The Coroner went through the motions of a person scratching another with his fingers, and the girl smiled her understanding but shook her head.

'No,' she declared, 'I never box him. I only cry, and when I cry, he cry too, and then it was finished. We were very very happy together. He loved me very much, and I very much loved him.'

She opened her handbag and produced a piece of paper. The Major had given it to her at the beginning of October after the

# "Jeanne of Arras"

By **BERNARD O'DONNELL,**  
Author of "The Trials of Mr. Justice Avory"

**A**TALL, slender figure with a wealth of auburn hair from beneath which looked out two large soulful eyes—eyes in which were the sorrow of a haunting tragedy.

Such was Jeanne Pignon, a beautiful young French girl, as she stood in the witness-box at the court of Mr. Ingleby Oddie, pouring out the tragic story of her shattered romance — shattered in one brief moment by the sharp staccato report of a revolver.

Only a few seconds before that shot rang out, she had been talking to her soldier lover on the telephone, and he had told her of his grim intention. She had repiled in her pretty broken English: "No—wait—wait—I come home quick."

But when she arrived Major Sydnart was lying dead

Pignon was a telegraphist in the offices of the Prefecture. Because of her great beauty and popularity she was known amongst the officers as "Jeanne of Arras."

It was a far call from the battle-scarred town of Arras to the prosaic Coroners' Court at Westminster. But there was nothing prosaic in the story unravelled by Mr. Oddie in the quiet searching voice of which he is master. It was at the inquest that I first saw Jeanne Pignon, but I saw her several times after that, and learned from her own lips the full story of her love for the major.

Wife and mistress faced each other in that crowded court—the former a distinguished figure in her long black coat with small white stripes, and a rich grey fur over which hung the black weeds of widowhood, and Jeanne as French as could be—her sickle-cut navy blue skirt daringly short.

## THE CASES OF CORONER INGLEBY ODDIE



"On Friday (the day of the tragedy) he had lunch with me and we had tea in the Strand. During tea he said to me: 'Jeanne, I have you at 6.15 because I have an appointment for dinner with Monsieur Jackson.' I say: 'No—I go with you.' He says: 'No, I come home at 7.30. You go home...'"

With infinite understanding, Mr. Jackson said: "No—I no be late in him," she said, and added: "You did not believe in this Mr. Jackson?"

The witness smiled wanly.

"No—I no be late in him," she said, and then continued. "He go to the Strand. He have several whiskies. I wait outside. We go to the Criterion, and I see a lady call and talk to him. I not understand what she say, but I go over and I say to her, 'Madam, I am sorry. I am Mrs. Stewart. If you have dinner with my husband, I go with you, too.' She say, 'I am sorry, I am go away'."

The witness agreed.

ON PAGE

JEANNE  
PIGNON,  
arrived on the scene, and asked what was the matter. After he and the woman had gone, the girl continued to say to the major, "Come home with me, darling. We go to Piccadilly station, and he ask for two tickets. When I get to Oxford Circus, I not see the major."

For a moment the torrent of words ceased as the agony and doubts of

Major Stewart,

They had arranged to meet on the following Saturday...but he did not come...but died sadly.

And all the Jeanne of

Arras" sat

rainy

quarrel about the other woman, and he had told her that if anything happened to him, it would be useful to her.

The Coroner took the document, which exuded a strong smell. He lifted it to his nose.

'You have some very powerful scent,' he remarked to the witness, as he opened the note. Then he read it aloud.

'I leave everything of which I am possessed, or coming to me, to Mlle Jeanne Pignon.' It was undated, but bore the dead man's signature.

In the room where the Major took his life, was found a note. Leaning back in his chair, Mr. Oddie fingered this note as he commenced to give his verdict, for the case was not one which warranted the calling of a jury.

'It is very unusual for a person who says that he is going to commit suicide, to do so,' he began, and then opening the letter containing the last written words of Major Stewart, he read the message it contained. It was addressed to 'Jeanne, my darling,' and then went on: 'These are the last words I shall write to you in my life. I have always been faithful to you without exception. You would never believe me, but preferred to listen to the talk of others. I wished to dine this evening with a perfectly respectable young lady, but you would not believe me. I hope, my darling, that the next one will be as faithful to you as I have been. Good-bye my darling. Trust and believe the next man.—Your broken hearted SYDNEY.'

'There can be little doubt,' declared Mr. Oddie, 'that Major Stewart was worried owing to his living a double life, and I have no hesitation in registering a verdict of "Suicide whilst of unsound mind".'

As I have stated I saw Jeanne Pignon several times after this, and was instrumental in obtaining a situation for her. As we sat together in the room in which she lived after the tragedy, she told me how there had been another Englishman in her life. This was before the Major appeared on the scene, but once she had seen him, there was no room in her heart for anybody else.

She herself had been gassed during the war and it was after she

had come out of hospital, that she went to take up her work at Arras, where she met her lover. They would drive out to Douai or Cambrai together.

‘His brother officers warned me not to give myself to him, she told me, ‘but I loved him, and when he asked me to go and live with him, I did not hesitate. I knew that he was married, but I knew that he loved me, and he said he was unhappy. I did not heed the advice of my friends, I did not heed the advice of my family. I simply went to him, and he was true to me—true till death.

‘Often I would wonder about his wife in England, and say to him, “It is not good for me that I should live with you when you are married. Go back to your wife. It will be better for you and better for her.”

‘And then he would get ever so sad and the tears would come into his eyes as he begged me not to leave him, saying, “If you leave me, my Jeanne, I will kill myself!” And then he would take me in his arms.’

‘Would you have let him go back to his wife?’ I once asked her when she was telling me her story, and without hesitation she replied, ‘Yes, Mr. O’Donnell—I would, but I should have died. You see I loved him. I gave up my friends and family to be with him. And he made his sacrifices for me. We were both jealous of each other. I could not bear him to speak to another woman, and he did not like me speaking to any other man. We had our little differences, but I would have done anything for his happiness—even to giving him up. He insisted that I should come to England and it was he who made all the arrangements for the passport and travelling.’

There were no regrets on the part of Jeanne Pignon at cutting adrift from her people, nor any self-pity because she was a stranger and almost friendless in a strange land. Only an abiding sorrow that her lover was dead.

‘I must get some work,’ she told me, ‘so that I can always be near him.’

I told her to keep in touch with me as I could probably help

her in this respect. She did so, and I was able to get her a situation as a typist. She attended Clarke's College to improve her English and stayed on for some months in her new job.

She often came to see me during this period, but somehow she found it difficult to settle down in a land so foreign to her way of life, a land which held such tragic memories. One day she came to me and said, 'I am going back home, Mr. O'Donnell. My people have asked me to return.'

'I think it's for the best, Jeanne,' I told her, 'and I hope you will find happiness.' I had one or two letters from her after she had gone, but gradually they ceased, and I heard no more. So passed 'Jeanne of Arras' from my ken.

## *Some Amusing Scamps*

HE HAD already spent forty-two years of his life in prison when I first met 'Old Dick'. He had been five times strapped to the triangle and lashed with the dreaded cat-o'-nine-tails. He was what you might call a hardened criminal, I suppose, but I liked him, and found him one of the most amusing and lovable scamps I ever happened across in the great underworld of crime.

Grey-haired he was, with sometimes a scrubby four days' growth of bristles on his chin. But he had the most mischievous pair of twinkling eyes that ever I saw. He walked with the sort of hopping movement of a sparrow. His eyes darted here, there and everywhere. His hands were never still, and whenever he came to see me—which was pretty regularly up to the time of his death—he always had a wicked grin on his face.

'Mr. Donald' was what he called me, although he knew it was O'Donnell, and every month when he came along for a few bob and some tobacco, he had some fresh story to tell me of his life in the workhouse whither he had retired on pain of going to penal servitude for the rest of his life.

He had sampled every prison in the country, had 'Old Dick'. Portland and Dartmoor held no terrors for him whilst Parkhurst or Camp Hill were simply homes from home. He knew gaols in the days when brutality was rife, and the quality of mercy was not strained in the direction of prison reform. And he could curdle one's blood with his stories of the 'bashings', the 'punishment cells', the 'figure eights', and the 'leg irons', that formed part of the prison régime of that day.

Long before the war, and long before any of the notorious 'cat burglars' who operated in town and country had achieved newspaper fame, 'Old Dick' was a master at the game. He was in

fact the original cat burglar, and, even when he reached the age of 70, could still shin a stack-pipe with the best, and never travelled far without his length of fine strong rope wound round his waist 'just in case like, Mr. Donald', as he would tell me.

Pawnbrokers and jewellers were his *forte*, and he simply could not resist a likely 'bust' if he saw something that appealed to him. In his youthful days he had worked as a slater. And he never broke into a shop except by getting through the roof. He would spot a possible 'crib', look out its easiest climbing points, and shif his way to the roof. Then he would remove a few slates, cut his way through any plaster that was necessary, and attach his rope to a joist and let himself down, leaving the rope dangling as a means of escape.

Having got into his pawnshop he knew the lay-out as though it were his own place. He knew that all the articles of a certain type would be kept on one floor. Jewellery on the first floor, clothing on the second, and so on.

Now Dick specialised in jewellery. 'Less trouble to get, and easier to dispose of,' he explained. So he would make his way to the floor on which the jewellery was kept. Needless to say, he very often made use of the little lift shaft which often runs from one floor to another, and which the pawnbroker uses to send his parcels up to their respective floors.

I mention these little points to show that Dick was a real artist. Just let me tell you how we first met. I was down at the London Sessions one day when I saw this chirpy little fellow in the dock charged with housebreaking. He pleaded guilty, and then made an impassioned plea for leniency. In graphic words that simply tumbled over one another as they poured from his lips, the prisoner declared that he had been *made into* a criminal by our prison system; that since the age of eleven when he was sentenced to the savage term of one month's imprisonment and five years in a reformatory, he had never been given a chance. Sentence after sentence had been passed upon him, totalling in all forty-two years out of the sixty-six years of his life. A terrible record indeed.

I remember the late Mr. A. J. Lawrie pondering the case, and see him now as he considered this 66-year-old man's record, which lay before him. Then he decided to 'bind him over' providing that the probation officer could find him some sort of work.

That is where I appeared on the scene. I felt dead sorry for this old man. I knew Mr. Heaseman the probation officer well, and went round and had a chat with him. We decided between us that we might be able to do something for Dick, and together we talked to him to find out what he would like to do.

He thought that he could make a go of mending windows.

We bought him a glazing outfit, with a board which he could strap to his back on which to carry such glass as he required. His idea was to go round the streets and look out for broken windows, then approach the householder, and suggest mending the windows.

Poor old Dick! He came to me a week or two afterwards, crestfallen, but with a grin still in his lined features.

'Guess I must have lost my touch, Mr. Donald,' he told me, 'I found plenty of work, but darn me if I didn't break more glass putting 'em in, than was broken when I started.'

So he had to give up the glazing business, and we next bought him a donkey and cart, got a stable with a loft above, which was sufficiently furnished for him to live in. We then bought some wood, which he had to chop and cart around selling.

Behold 'Old Dick' then, touring the streets of the poorer districts of London with his donkey and cart selling firewood. He got on very well for a time, and I decided that I would just slip up and have a look to see how he was faring.

So along to his stable and loft I went. There was the old donkey feeding away below, and from the loft above came the sound of voices. There was a step ladder leading up into the loft, and as I made to mount it, I remarked to myself, 'Seems as though Dick has got company.'

Then I paused half-way up as a certain sentence caught my ear.

'Yes,' 'Old Dick' was saying, 'I fetched her back with me, and she stayed here for a couple of days. Then I got fed up with her.

She wouldn't wash her damned self, and kept on scratching, I decided she was "cooty" and told her to clear off.'

I continued up the ladder, and you should have seen Dick's face when he saw my head appear through the floor of the loft. He tried to make a brave recovery.

'Why, Mr. Donald,' he said as though with pleasure, 'I never expected to see you here——'

'You were just remarking on your little romance, Dick,' I said, 'you might as well let me know the rest.'

'Well—it's like this. The poor old devil was down and out, and I fetched her back here for a "kip". I gave her a bob when I slung her out. I treated her properly, didn't I?'

Very gravely I agreed that he had behaved like a perfect gentleman.

Now again, Dick might have got on very well with his wood round, but once he gathered a few regular customers together they soon found out that he was 'easy'. They would have the wood and promise to pay on the Friday. But Friday never came. Or they would suggest he was giving them short measure, and he would simply heap the wood into the pinafores and boxes held out before him, until he was working at a loss.

Then one day the donkey fell down dead on him, and 'Old Dick' failed to report to Mr. Heaseman. I suppose the poor devil thought we should attach blame to him.

The next I heard from him was when he was arrested at Woolwich, and sent to me the letter which appears on page 173. It bore the address 'Brixton Prison' and was signed with one of the many aliases he favoured.

'Old Dick' had been wandering around Woolwich—with his bit of rope round his waist—and spotted a likely lay with a convenient stackpipe ready to hand. That evening he returned after the shop was shut, climbed to the roof—he was 68 by now, remember—removed some slates, cut through the ceiling, and lowered himself from the joist by means of his rope.

Unfortunately he lowered himself on to a landing where two dogs were sleeping outside the bedroom door of the manager of



the shop. The dogs started to bark. Dick greased up his rope, and began to make his way across the roofs with a view to making his escape in another direction. As he went, his foot slipped through the glass of a roof fanlight, shattering the silence of the night as he made off like a wraith.

The bits of glass happened to fall upon a man sleeping in an attic; startled into wakefulness he stood on his bed and was thus able to poke his head through the fanlight in time to see Dick clambering up the sheer wall of a furniture repository some few houses away.

In the meantime the pawnbroker had given the alarm. Police whistles shrilled, and in a room of the repository, hiding behind a settee, they eventually found 'Old Dick'. Hence his letter to me.

Once more I went to see Mr. Heaseman, and suggested that he put in a good word for 'Old Dick'. I also spoke for him at court, and mentioned how the old fellow had really tried to go straight. Sentence was postponed for six months providing he went into the workhouse, and this he did.

Once more, however, Dick fell from grace. This time his downfall was most humiliating, as he told me when at length he again appeared in the dock.

'I don't mind being pinched on the square,' he said when he was narrating the story, 'but when I get it in the neck through sheer hard luck, it makes me cuss.'

What had happened was this. He got into the shop by his usual means—through the roof—and then made his way to the parcel lift shaft. Taking off his boots, he tied his rope to the top of the shaft, and then getting into the shaft let himself down its smooth sides till he was some way down.

He told me how on some occasions he had been able to simply press his knees against the side of the shaft and let himself drop. On this occasion he got down only to find that he had forgotten to pull the lift right up to the top of the building first. So that it was blocking up the aperture through which he had anticipated entering the shop, except for about nine inches at the top of the lift.

That was not the worst! When he came to pull himself up to

rectify the omission, he found that in some way or other, he was stuck fast. Try as he would, he could neither move up nor down.

There he stayed in an agony of cramped body, for hours.

At length he heard the assistants opening the shop, and prayed that they would pull the lift up and perhaps in this way ease him from his position. He could hear them talking, until suddenly, there was a terrible silence. It was broken by the sound of a voice.

‘God’s’ truth,’ said someone, ‘here’s a pair of feet in the parcel chute.’

Other assistants crowded round, and the police were summoned. It was a disgusted and irate prisoner they found when they arrived.

Once more we got ‘Old Dick’ away with it, and from that day he gave up his crook career, and stayed quietly in the workhouse until he died.

And now let me give you a glimpse of prison life as seen through the eyes of this old man. I have mentioned his first conviction at the age of eleven. By the time he came out of the reformatory school where he learned much of crime and criminals, he was sixteen, and it was then he became a slater.

But it always happened that his employers were given the tip by somebody that he was an ex-prisoner, and he would be given the sack. He went from job to job until he fell into temptation again and stole another purse. This time he received eighteen months and five years’ police supervision. That was in 1872. He was released from that term in 1874, and that same year—with no work to do he stole a purse containing 8s. 5d. It was then that he received one of the most savage sentences it is possible to conceive. At the age of 22, he received his first term of penal servitude. But let him tell you the story as he told it to me, the bitterness still rankling in his heart.

Said ‘Old Dick’: ‘For stealing 8s. 5d. I was sent to penal servitude for seven years, with five years’ police supervision to follow. Every spark of goodness in my nature was killed during the torture of that seven years, and I came out of prison a wild and desperate criminal.

‘I spent the first months of this term at Pentonville, and it was there that I received my first flogging with the “cat”. I took it without turning a hair, although I was told afterwards that the blood was streaming down my back.

‘Every form of punishment that could be suffered I experienced. I have spent week after week in the “punishment” cell, and have had “leg-irons” and “figure-eights” on for six months at a time. The “leg-irons” were riveted on so that they could not be removed. The “figure-eights” were handcuffs which fastened the hands behind the back, and it was agony to wear them.

‘Of the terrible fights which I have had in prison with the brutal warders who reigned in those days I could fill a book. I have been beaten and bludgeoned with the “coshes” they carried to such an extent that, when helpless and bruised, I have been unable to move, warders have had to undress me; they have discovered my underclothes soaked in blood and have had to remove them with care lest they should tear the flesh away with the garments.

‘On being released from this term I was given a suit of clothes—labelled convict all over—ten shillings, and a railway ticket to Wakefield. When I reached home my father suggested that I should work for him, and I gratefully accepted the offer. There were still five years’ police supervision, which meant that I had to report every month.

‘The next day I tramped six-and-a-half miles to the nearest town to report myself, only to find that the superintendent was not there. I left my name and address and said I would call again on the first day of the next month.

‘Once more I trudged the six-and-a-half miles, but on approaching the police station I was hailed by a policeman, who told me that he had got to take me in charge for not reporting immediately after my release.

‘I was taken to the station, and there saw the superintendent, who looked me up and down and then said, “Let him sit on that chair, and chain him to it while I finish paying out”.

‘For an hour-and-a-half I sat chained to the chair in full view of every policeman who came in for his weekly pay. Then I was

taken before a magistrate to whom I explained my case and was discharged; but the damage was done. Every constable in the vicinity knew me for an ex-convict, and I was a marked man from that day.

‘My next sentence was in 1883, after I had got away with a nice little haul of rings in Liverpool. On that occasion I was unfortunate enough to get in touch with a man who told me that he knew a “fence” who would give a better price than what I had been getting. The “fence” was out of town, and this man did the most foolish thing that he could do—pawned the jewellery.

‘The result was that in the end we were captured, together with the “fence”, and came up for trial. I was the youngest man of the lot, but my sentence was ten times heavier than that of either of the others. Even including the “fence”, who in law is always looked upon as being worse than the thief. I got ten years’ penal servitude, and during that ten years I went through hell again.

‘It was made up of the usual graft and the regular punishments which somehow I could not manage to escape.’

Such was the story Dick told me and which I published. He was by no means a model prisoner, as he readily admitted.

It was the dread sameness of gaol life that used to get him down. So that every now and again he would cut loose and do something to break the monotony.

On one occasion he broke away whilst at exercise, and gave the warders a chase in and out the exercise yards, until at length he made a running leap on to a ten-foot wall, clambered up a lamp-post at one end, and sat straddle-legged over the cross-bar, and removed his heavy boots.

Sitting thus, and armed with his boots, he sang lewd and ribald songs of his own composition—mostly about the warders—and challenged anybody to come and get him down. They tried everything, from threats to cajolery, but nobody made any attempt to go up and get him. In the end he came down at the request of the chaplain who had a soft spot for the rebellious little devil who was always upsetting the gaol.

He told me of the 'sing-songs' the men in the punishment cells used to get up amongst themselves. As Dick told me:

'There was a little light amusement from time to time such as when we of the punishment brigade held an impromptu concert.

'On these occasions it was necessary to lie flat on the floor, so that we could sing under the door. A chairman was appointed whose duty it was to call on "number-so-and-so" for a song or a recitation, and the convict called upon would promptly "oblige".

'Naturally, all the songs and recitations would not bear repetition, but you can take it from me that as we were already awaiting punishment of some kind, we did not care what happened, and except for an occasional "beating up" on the part of the warders, we had a pretty good time'.

I have mentioned that 'Old Dick' had been five times lashed on the triangle. It was at Portland that he received twenty-four lashes, and describing the event to me, he said:

'A prisoner is not told when he is to receive the "cat". And in consequence he does not know until about ten minutes before the thrashing actually takes place. The first intimation is when a warder tells the man to strip to the waist. A blanket is thrown around the offender's shoulders and he is marched, handcuffed, to the flogging room.

'As soon as I arrived at the flogging room the sentence was read out to me by the Governor of the prison.

'"George Williams, you have been sentenced to receive twenty-four lashes with the authorised 'cat' to be inflicted without delay."

'The room was a large one, and the two flogging officers stood on mats so that they did not slip while wielding the "cat". The "cats" which are of different weights, were laid out on the floor in front of the huge triangle which occupied the centre of the room.

'The Governor, the medical officers, the chief warder, and several other warders were present, and in addition there were half a dozen civil guards armed with rifles and fixed bayonets.

‘As soon as the Governor had read out my sentence I was seized and marched to the triangle. A rope was run under the handcuffs, and my arms were drawn up as far as they would go over my head. My legs were then strapped to the uprights on either side, at the thighs and at the ankles.

‘It was impossible for me to move, and there I hung suspended while the doctor selected the particular “cat” with which I was to be flogged.

‘The first flogging warder stepped on to the rug and took the “cat” into his hand. He weighed it as though to get used to the feel of it. The Governor then said, “Commence the punishment”, and the warder raised the “cat” aloft. There was a sudden whistling in the air as the weapon came down, and then it felt as though someone had seared my back with a red-hot iron. I felt the thongs curl around me and cat into my flesh. At least, that is what it felt like, and I had to bite my lips to keep from crying out.’

And so on to the end. He was afterwards taken back to his cell, and there a towel soaked in salt water was placed across his shoulders in a spartan attempt at rapid healing. It was this ‘bashing’ which led to him getting a second one, this time of thirty-six lashes, which is the maximum to be awarded.

The man who had got him into trouble was an officer with whom he determined to get even. As he put it to me, ‘There was murder in my heart, and I would have swung for him’. One day Dick waited behind his cell door with a heavy bit of ventilator which he had broken off. When this officer opened the door to let the Governor in on his usual morning round, Dick made one aim for him with the ventilator which must have brained him had it connected.

It did not, and the cell door was hurriedly slammed to and pandemonium reigned. The Governor was in a towering rage, and there were a dozen warders round the door in no time.

‘Burst the door—if there is any resistance cut him down,’ cried the Governor. In those days the officers carried cutlasses.

Relating the story of this exploit ‘Old Dick’s’ eyes twinkled as he went on to tell the sequel. Said he: ‘When I heard this I made

up my mind that they should have a run for their money before they did get in. Now and again, when I wanted to break the monotony of things, I used to keep the officers out of my cell for the fun of the thing. It was quite a simple process, and I adopted the same scheme on every occasion.

‘I sat down on the floor with my back against the door and my heels firmly fixed against the bottom edge of my bedboard, which was screwed firmly to the floor. By exerting all my strength, and stiffening my legs, I could keep anyone out of the cell as long as I liked.

‘While I was sitting tight, I sang a number of rude songs which I had composed about the Governor and the other officers. And the louder I sang the more angry they got outside.

‘At last the chief warder thought of a bright scheme. There was a small space between the floor and the bottom of the door, through which a prisoner pushed his clothes at night. This brilliant fellow knelt down, and, through the aperture, began to jab me with the point of his cutlass.

‘I was not prepared for this, and it caused me to lose my grip. I saw that I could not hold out much longer under those conditions, so I determined to make the most of my little game, and chose a moment when all the warders were pushing together with all their might. Then I slipped suddenly aside, with the result that they all fell with a thud into my cell. You never saw a funnier sight in all your life than that struggling mass of puffing warders writhing on the floor!’

‘Old Dick’ was put back for the Director, and charged with attempted murder. He got thirty-six lashes, loss of six months’ remission, and cross-irons for six months.

One day when he came to the office, he stripped off his shirt and showed me his back. It was like a bird-cage. The weals where the lash had cut deep into the flesh were still there, a permanent record for all time. Of all the crooks I have ever met—and they have been ‘dips’, ‘hoists’, ‘con’ men, cracksmen, forgers and ‘screwsmen’, in fact, every type of criminal known to our courts, I have never known a more engaging fellow than ‘Old

Dick', and I like to think that I was able to make his lot a little easier in the closing years of his life.

One bright April day in 1941 I was seeing my wife off at King's Cross station on the way to Edinburgh. We were standing at the open carriage door having a final chat before the train departed when a burly figure rolled up with a boisterous greeting, 'Hullo Bernard—haven't seen you for a long time. Still at the old place?'

'Yes, Bill,' I replied and then grinned. 'What's this—a professional visit to King's Cross?'

'Oh no,' he replied, 'I'm just seeing the missus off from the next platform, and saw you standing here and couldn't resist coming over to say "How do".' He turned and bowed to my wife. 'And the lady?' he queried with admirable discretion (just in case it wasn't the wife). I introduced them to each other.

Bill was all charm and flattery. 'I've heard a lot about you and the boys from Bernard,' he told her, 'and have always envied him his good luck.'

There was much more of this sort of thing intermingled with stray bits of gossip about what we were respectively 'doing', and then the whistle for Bill's train blew and he dashed over to bid his 'missus' a fond farewell.

'What a charming man,' said my wife. 'Who is he?'

'Oh—that's "Laddo" Hurley,' I replied. 'One of the slickest luggage thieves and pickpockets in town. He's running straight now though. Got a newspaper stand in this area.'

I could see the shocked expression on my wife's face as she leaned from the carriage window to bid me good-bye. 'You and your friends,' was all she said.

William (or 'Laddo') Hurley had been quite a boy in his time. He had earned the soubriquet of 'Laddo' because of his always immaculate appearance. But at the 'whizz' (pickpocket) game and in fact most other forms of crime, he was without peer. I'd known him for years, and he often tipped me off about a crime completed or one that was brewing. If I wanted some information about a particular job 'Laddo' could generally get it.

'Would the wife like a nice fur coat?' he would ask me, and when I refused suggesting that it might be the proceeds of a recent fur robbery, he would shake his head more in sorrow than in anger and chide me with a reproachful, 'As though I'd try and put it across a pal like you, Bernard.'

One very foggy November Saturday, he came into my office, 'Lend us thirty bob till Monday,' he said.

I was always a bit wary where Laddo was concerned. 'What do you want it for, Bill?'

'Want to get a stick,' he replied frankly. A 'stick' in crook parlance is a jemmy, used for breaking and entering, or forcing open reluctant cupboards, drawers, or jewel cases.

'Nothing doing,' I told him, and Bill went off. He told me later that it had been his intention under cover of the fog, to break into some premises next door to a jewellers, and then, with the whole weekend to work in, make a hole in the dividing wall, enter the jewellers and get away with a good haul. The 'job' did not come off owing to my decision *not* to compound a felony.

When at the 'whizz' game he would sally forth clad in correct evening dress, with smart black coat over his arm, and buy a seat for the stalls of some West End stage hit. Once in his seat, and during the interval he would select likely victims—women with plenty of jewellery or men with well-filled wallets—and then when the play was over he would saunter out with coat over arm, stalk them into the vestibule, and in the crush relieve his victims of their jewels or money.

Once when he was arrested as a suspect he had a valuable gold watch upon him, but managed to secrete it between the back part of his neck and his collar, where the thick part of his jacket was. The detectives who searched him could find nothing upon him, but Bill could hear the watch ticking merrily away. He was put into a cell with others waiting to be charged. Among them was a man who had already been fined for some offence and was waiting for a friend to come along and pay the fine. Bill became pally, handed over sufficient money to pay the fine and a bit

besides, and smuggled the watch into the other's hand, with instructions to pass it on to a pal outside.

That there is honour among thieves is clear from the fact that when Bill was acquitted later in the day—(there being insufficient evidence against him) he found the watch had been passed on to his friend as per his directions.

He was not without humour, our Bill. During a long term in Portland Gaol, he ran amok and tore up all his prison clothes. By way of punishment he was put into an 'untearable' strait jacket, his hands being imprisoned in long closed sleeves, and strapped behind his shoulders.

The next morning when the Prison Governor made his usual round of inspection, there was Bill, as naked as he was born, the strait jacket ripped to shreds lying on the floor. And—not content with this he had taken two of the buckles from the jacket, wedged one in each eye, spectacle fashion, while in his mouth he had a piece of the material rolled up to look like a cigar.

'Could you oblige me with a light, dear boy,' he asked the Governor. All he got however, was a further dose of 'punishment cells'.

Yes he was certainly a 'Laddo' right up to the time of his death some years ago.

'Laddo' was always immaculately dressed, but was not above assuming other garb if it suited his purpose. That he was observant of others is exemplified by a jewel theft he carried out in broad daylight at a shop in the very heart of the busy Strand.

Outside this shop there hung a showcase containing several hundred pounds worth of rings and watches. It was locked to staples in the wall at the entrance. The case took Laddo's eye. He watched to see what happened to it at the end of the day, and found that about five minutes before the shop closed, a man wearing a green baize apron came out and unlocked the case and carried it inside.

One night he arrived on the scene with green apron complete, but concealed beneath his jacket. He went into the passage way of an adjoining block of offices and removed his jacket, donning

the apron. Then within thirty seconds he had wrenched the showcase from its fastenings, covered it with a cloth he had brought, and whisked it into a cab driven by a crook who was used to the game, and he was off.

On another occasion when intent upon raiding another jeweller's shop in the Strand with some confederates, he rang the fire alarm outside, and, whilst the engines were dashing about looking for the non-existent fire, entered the shop and cleared up nearly a thousand pounds worth of stuff.

He opened an account at the old Birkbeck Bank in Holborn, and one of his coups was worked in the bank. He bought a pair of kid gloves exactly similar to those worn by an old man who used to come regularly to the bank with a wallet full of bank notes.

One day Hurley sidled up to him, dropped the imitation gloves by his side, and when the man had deposited his cash on the counter, remarked, 'Are these your gloves?' Whilst the man was picking them up, Hurley whipped up the cash and was out of the door like a flash.

A great opportunist was Laddo.

One morning just before Christmas, the commissionaire in the lodge at Kemsley House rang up to say that a taximan was down below and wanted to see me urgently. I had my contacts among all sorts of people, and thought this might be one of my taxi driver friends with some item of information.

When I got down I found he was a stranger, but—a welcome one. At least I thought so as he produced a couple of fine fat turkeys. They really were prime birds even to my inexperienced eye.

'A gentleman told me to bring them along here to you,' he said, 'and told me you would pay what's on the clock.'

'Did he give any name?' I asked feeling that I would like to drop a note and thank the donor for his seasonable gift.

'No Mister, he didn't give no name,' said the taximan. There was 2s. 6d. on the clock so I handed over a couple of half-crowns and joyously carried the birds upstairs.

'Blimey—won a sweep?' queried someone in the office.

'No—just a present from a pal,' I murmured.

'Didn't know you had any.'

I let the remark go while I pondered the best way of getting the birds home.

Just then the commissionaire rang again. Would I go down to the lodge, a gentleman wanted to see me.

I found Laddo in a lather of sweat awaiting me. He motioned me to go outside with him. I went.

'You got the birds all right?' he asked, and a horrible feeling swept over me.

'Yes—' I replied. 'They're upstairs.'

'One for you and one for me, Bernard,' he said gleefully. 'I knocked them off at Smithfield. Had to get rid of them quick in case I was rumblled so I slung them into the taxi and told the driver to take 'em to the *Sketch* and ask for you. I knew you'd pay him.'

Of course it was very wrong, and Laddo should not have been encouraged in his wicked ways. But what would you have done chum?

I can only say that I have never tasted a finer turkey in my life. How I came by it is one of the dark secrets between me and my wife. She has a horror of any sort of dishonesty.

As I have said before, Laddo finished up with a newspaper pitch at the corner of a street not far from King's Cross.

One night, when I was returning to Charing Cross station from the West End, I noticed a crowd outside a jewellers near the London Hippodrome.

I joined the throng and observed that they were all looking towards the roof of the building where shadowy forms could be seen moving around in the fitful light of bull's-eye lanterns. At the same time I noticed that there were several policemen standing at various vantage points with the obvious intention of preventing the escape of some intruder.

'What's the excitement?' I asked one of the crowd.

'Cops chasing a burglar,' he said.

I decided to see things through and then 'phone a little story over to the *Daily Sketch*.

Presently I felt somebody edging near me in the crowd. A voice whispered, 'Hullo, Bernard' and I looked round. It was William Atkins, better known to the police as the 'Harlequin' because he was at one time an actor appearing in pantomime.

'What the devil are you doing here?' I asked him, but he just grinned and said, 'Tell you later.'

We stood there together till the police called off the search. Then we went into an all night café.

William took a gulp and then said, 'I think I managed that very nicely, don't you?'

An idea was floating across my mind.

'Come on—spill it,' I said, and he did.

It was *he* who had got into the shop and was sitting pretty with some sheet gold and silver when he suddenly saw some lovely gold-mounted ladies' handbags in the window. He thought how nice it would be to take the missus home a nice bag, and reached out his hand. Inadvertently he touched a catch and the window-blind shot up with a bang.

'I was scared stiff,' said William when relating the story, 'but the copper who happened to be standing outside thought he had been shot. I saw him stand for a second with his mouth wide open while he looked straight at me. Then he recovered and blew his whistle.'

During his pantomime career William had played the part of 'Cat' in *Dick Whittington*. During his performance he used to create something of a stir by walking along the ledge of the dress-circle and climbing from circle to gallery by way of the boxes.

I mention this because of the manner of his escape from the police that night after the burgled premises had been cordoned round and escape seemed impossible.

The moment the policeman blew his whistle, William made for the roof. His luck was in for he found repairs were under way with the result that a long ladder towering above the roof, was secured to the gutter by a fifty-six pound weight.

Meanwhile the police had gained an entry and were on their way up to the roof. There was no time to be lost so William cut the rope tying the ladder to the weight, and then, getting on to the topmost rung gauged the distance to the roof on the opposite side of the narrow street which runs behind the Hippodrome round by the stage door. Giving himself a push with one leg, he hurtled through the air at the end of the ladder. It struck the building opposite and after a slight bounce settled against the gutter.

He slipped round the chimney pots to where a trapdoor led on to a landing below. He could hear voices, one a woman's saying, 'I don't know what to get him for his supper. He don't like fried fish and he don't like bread and cheese.'

William had no time to waste on these culinary details and made his way quietly down the stairs and out of the back door into the garden. He clambered over a fence and after negotiating one or two other garden walls got into a tailor's shop. Selecting an overcoat at random he donned it, and thus disguised went to a side door giving access to the street. He could still see his hunters scouring the rooftops, and boldly marched round to the front of the premises which he had entered. Having joined the crowd of expectant watchers he spotted me, and could not resist letting me know all about it.

His one regret—'I had to dump the sheet gold and silver, and the missus won't get her handbag after all.'

'Well—I must put over a story,' I said making for a call-box. 'I haven't seen you to-night, William. Don't forget. Oh—and I've got a very bad memory. I forget things very easily.'

'I know, Bernard—I knew I could trust you.'

*In the 'Abode of Love'*

ONE COULD scarcely find a less likely setting for tragedy than the picturesque market town of Dunster, Somerset, a few miles out of Minehead. Yet the occasion of my visit there on one bright August morning in 1928 was a sad double tragedy in which a man had murdered his wife and child.

The West Saxon kings had a fortress there known as Dunne's Torre (tower on the downs) from which the village takes its name. To-day Dunster is still in proud possession of its Castle, while in the centre of its market place is the age-old Dunster Cross bearing testimony to the ancient origin of the town.

There was nothing of great interest in the story I was engaged upon; it was an open and shut case without mystery. Having completed my inquiries I decided to have a look round the town. And it was during my wanderings that a motorist halted me to ask the way to Spaxton.

Upon such a casual incident hangs the story I am about to tell of how I broke into—not in any felonious sense—the 'Abode of Love', the first newspaper man for nearly twenty years to gain entrance to this retreat of that strange religious sect, the Agapemonites.

It was only when the motorist asked me the way that I suddenly recalled how, just over eighteen months before, I had visited Spaxton with a crowd of other Pressmen to cover the death of Smyth-Piggott, the self-styled Messiah who for years had reigned over the Agapemonites, taking unto himself what he was pleased to term 'soul-brides' in the process.

On that occasion, I had endeavoured by means straight and devious to enter the 'Abode' with a view to getting an interview

with 'Brother' Douglas Hamilton, who had assumed the mantle of the dead Smyth-Piggott. There were a score or so of newspaper men down there, all anxious to write up the burial scenes and funeral rites of the defunct 'Messiah', and if possible to get a glimpse of some of the women—young and old—who had given up the outside world to submit to the ministrations of the 'Master'.

We resorted to all manner of ruses to get into the place, but not one of us managed to get any nearer to the mansion set in its large and lovely grounds than the lane in which the 'Abode' stood.

All this I remembered in a flash, as I indicated the way to the man in the car. And in that moment was born the idea that, as I was in the neighbourhood, I might just as well spend a few days round about Spaxton and see if I could get in touch with the new 'Master', as he was reverently called by the villagers for miles around. The fact that no Pressman had penetrated this fastness, with its high forbidding walls and heavily studded and bolted gates, since the coming of Smyth-Piggott to Spaxton, acted as a spur to me. Especially as in the years that had passed since that time so many stories had been told concerning what went on within those walls, and so many suggestions made about the orgies which were said to constitute the religious rites and ceremonies of the sect.

My idea was to go to Douglas Hamilton, tell him flatly what *had* been said and was *still* being said regarding the 'Abode' being nothing more than a place where free love was indulged in, and give him the opportunity of telling the world the real truth concerning the beliefs and activities of the Agapemonites, enshrouded as they were with such mystery.

I knew that Douglas Hamilton could tell me more than any other living soul, for he was a member of the Agapemone during the lifetime of its founder, the crazy and lascivious old 'Brother Prince', and was largely instrumental in bringing Smyth-Piggott to the 'Abode' to take the place of Prince after the latter died.

There is little doubt that James Henry Prince, ex-clergyman of the Church of England, who founded the Agapemonites, began

his religious teachings with great zeal; but it is no less certain that he finished up at an incredibly old age, half lunatic—half fanatic, yet worshipped as divine by a number of neurotic 'brides' whom he had debauched under a cloak of 'celestial marriage'.

Brother Prince died in 1899, leaving behind at Spaxton a colony of faithful adherents comprised mostly of women of wealth who had pooled their fortunes for the common good of the sect. Amongst them were Douglas Hamilton, who had become a member long years before, and a Miss Eva Patterson, known in the colony as the 'Child of Love'.

She was more or less the virtual leader after the death of Prince, but hearing of Smyth-Piggott's claims, and helped in her decision by Mr. Hamilton, it is alleged, she sent the latter to London to prevail upon Smyth-Piggott to take up his residence at Spaxton as the new Messiah and head of the Agapemonites.

Hamilton had already met Piggott in Ireland, and it was Hamilton who introduced Piggott to the teachings of Prince. Before this, however, Piggott had displayed a marked tendency towards religious mania.

It was while engaged as a curate in the Church of England—at St. Jude's, Mildmay Park, in 1890—that he first gave signs of possessing exaggerated notions of himself and his 'divinity'. His rector, the Rev. J. W. Smith, testified to Piggott's saintliness and zeal, but said he had to part with him because of the extravagant claims he made from the pulpit.

'I am not man,' he proclaimed, 'God is in me.' He claimed to hear heavenly 'voices' which confided to him strange 'truths'. He experienced wonderful 'dreams' in which his mission upon earth was made clear to him. When he went to the Townsend Mission Church, Dublin, the 'voices' and 'dreams' grew in intensity.

'I am not Mr. Piggott, but the very God,' he told the people, and—surprisingly—they believed him.

Piggott had been a sailor before the mast, curate, student and Salvation Army officer before becoming preacher at a church near Clapton Common, the London temple of the Agapemonites.

By Piggott this place of worship was euphemistically called 'The Ark of the Covenant', and it was here that, one day in 1902, he made his sensational announcement:

'Brother Prince was sent before his Lord's face to prepare the way for the second coming of Him who suffered for sin, to prepare the way for the restoration of all things,' he declaimed and then went on, 'His testimony was true, and the work of the Holy Ghost in him was perfect, *and I who speak to you to-night, I am the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again and ascended into Heaven. I am He that liveth, and behold, I am alive for evermore.*'

One after another members of the congregation stood up and solemnly affirmed their belief in him, and from thence onwards the 'Ark of the Covenant' was the scene of many riotous outbursts on the part of people who objected to what they termed blasphemy.

Eventually Piggott went to Spaxton, as already mentioned, and with him went one Ruth Annie Preece whom Piggott had proclaimed as his 'Spiritual Bride', in spite of the fact that his wife was still alive. The new 'bride' became world-famous as 'Sister Ruth', and lurid stories of Piggott's conduct with both her and other 'spiritual brides' spread around.

It was in the 'Abode of Love' that 'Sister Ruth' gave birth to the three children of whom the 'Master' was inordinately fond. Twice she broke away from the sect, on one occasion travelling the country with 'Glory', the first-born son, who later became a medical student in London. But after each occasion she went back again.

Then she left the sect once more in 1920, when her children were more or less grown up. This was when a certain 'Sister Grace' supplanted her as the spiritual bride of Smyth-Piggott. But again she returned, remaining there till she died in 1935.

For years, all sorts of astounding stories were circulated from time to time concerning what went on within the high walls of the 'Abode of Love'. Stories of a 'blend of mysticism mingled with voluptuous human love', and of 'spiritual brides who participated in "free love", and were slaves to a system of religious

excitement that had its invariable sex aspect, and whose lips have received the kisses of illicit love'.

Even against Mr. Hamilton himself it was alleged that after the death of Prince and after he had officiated at that midnight burial of the founder of the sect, attended by the mourning 'wives' of the pseudo self-styled Christ, he stayed on 'and comforted the bereaved brides'.

All these things were stated in the public Press time and time again, together with details of almost incredible orgies of lust and immorality, and descriptions of unholy rites of a sexual nature performed behind the shuttered windows of the Temple.

Never a word of denial came from any of the members of the sect; no explanation of how the stories arose; and no indication as to what the precise beliefs of the Agapemonites really were or what they were based on.

These were among the points I wanted to clear up and there seemed to be no time like the present. So I went to Spaxton, and to the *Lamb Inn* which adjoins the 'Abode'. I thought I might be able to stay there for a few days while I sounded the position, but soon discovered that there was nothing doing in this line. There was no accommodation for visitors, I was informed, so I turned my attention to the 'Abode' itself and set out on a reconnoitring expedition.

A huge red stone wall some ten feet in height surrounded the delightful gabled mansion and its well-kept, spacious grounds. The entrance to the house was by way of a pair of massive wooden gates heavily studded, and surmounted by ornamental but effective spikes.

There were other heavily studded wooden doors let into the wall at various points but they were always locked and bolted, and were never open except to admit the occupants of the place, or the one or two known tradesmen who brought provisions to the members of the sect.

Strangers were not permitted to cross the threshold under any circumstances, and in this connection the sect was aided in every possible way by loyal villagers who had nothing but good

words to say of the fifty or so believers gathered together in the 'Abode of Love', who behaved with the utmost kindness to those in the immediate vicinity.

On my previous visit I had tried hammering on those stout gates with a view to attracting the attention of someone inside, but without result. All that happened was the ferocious snarling and barking of a dog, apparently inside the house; but beyond that—not the least evidence of life betrayed itself, and there was no answer to my repeated banging on the gate. I turned the handle of the door let into the wall, but found it securely locked. I looked around for a bell, but there was no bell to the 'Abode of Love'. I noticed a heavy iron ring fastened high up on the formidable wall, as though it might once have been used to tether a horse whilst the visitor went inside. But at that time no visitors were welcomed except those who came down to visit the members of the sect.

Having already had experience in 1927 of the reluctance on the part of any of the villagers to give any sort of information about the occupants of the 'Abode', I realised that there was little to hope for in this direction if, on this visit in 1928, I was to get in touch with Mr. Hamilton.

Yet I felt that perhaps one or two judicious inquiries might help me to gain some sort of information which would prove useful in getting into the 'Abode'. I knocked on the door of one of the cottages which lie in a row at the side of the 'Abode', shadowed by its towering high wall, to ask whether they happened to know if the 'Master' chanced to be in the village just then.

At once an expression of blankness spread over the face of the woman who answered my knock, and I could see that this query would avail me nothing. She pulled the door to after her, and stood on the step outside. Then she looked me sternly in the eye, and replied: 'I know nothing about their business—I know nothing about them at all.'

She went in and shut the door behind her. I went farther afield and made one or two other inquiries, and was successful in learning that not only was Mr. Hamilton at the Agapemone, but that

'Sister Ruth'—surely, if all the stories which have been told concerning her are true, one of the most tragically pathetic 'spiritual brides' who ever lived—was also living there at the moment, and had been for some years past, having returned after breaking away from Smyth-Piggott for a time.

Having made quite certain that the one man who could tell the world the real truth about the 'Abode of Love' was there, I determined that somehow or other—I was not quite sure how or when—I must gain access to the grounds and present myself at the house itself in my effort to interview Mr. Hamilton.

For two days I haunted that village, 'exploring every avenue' as one might say, to see the 'Master', or one of the inmates of the 'Abode'. I resorted to every ruse I could think of to gain access to the place itself, bar actually climbing the walls with their covering of jagged broken glass. I wanted to avoid this if at all possible, in order not to annoy the inhabitants of the 'Abode', and so spoil my chances of an interview.

Then I happened on yet another of those lucky streaks. I was in a shop in a neighbouring village, and crawling on the floor was the baby of a woman shop-keeper. It was a glorious morning, and as I glanced at the baby I saw its little hand outstretched to clutch a wasp which was also crawling on the floor half dead.

In a flash I was round the counter. I snatched up the child and stamped on the wasp; a second afterwards I was explaining to the mother what had happened. We began talking, and with the one thought in my mind which obsessed me at the moment, I told her how interested I was in the 'Abode of Love', and how much I wanted to have a talk with the 'Master'.

She smiled and remarked that it would be impossible. He never talked to anyone outside his immediate circle. Then she happened to drop word that one of her relatives worked at the 'Abode'. Not inside the retreat, but in the laundry outside. I pricked up my ears, and casually asked when she would be seeing her niece.

That very afternoon as it happened. I decided on a bold stroke.

'Look here, lady,' I said, 'I'm a newspaper man, and I want to get into the "Abode". If anybody knows how I can do it, your niece should. What about helping me?'

There was much more talk, but at length I managed to persuade her to do her best, and in fact I afterwards spoke to the girl who worked there, arranged with her that a certain side gate leading from laundry garden into the 'Abode' would be left open for a few minutes at a certain time the next day. I would have to pass through the gate at the time mentioned, and the gate would be locked again. I must get out as best I could.

This suited me down to the ground.

The next day, as arranged, I passed silently and unobserved through that side gate, which a few minutes after was locked behind me.

I was inside the grounds of the 'Abode of Love'!

Let me describe what I saw there. The chapel or temple where the various rites and ceremonies took place in accordance with the belief of the Agapemonites, lies on the right as one enters the big gates. I did not approach it from this angle, however, for the gate through which I had gained entry was on the far side of the 'Temple'. This I found was a lofty gabled building, the top of which, as one looked at it from the outside, was surmounted by a huge lion standing on its hind legs and pawing the air. What the lion symbolised I do not know, nor did my inquiries elicit any information on the point.

A flagged stone path led round the side of the Temple, the windows of which were set rather high up in the walls. By tip-toeing one could just glimpse through them, but even so, nothing could be seen, for the simple reason that the windows were shrouded by black inside shutters which reached half-way up, thus preventing the eyes of the profane gazing in upon any of the mystic ceremonies which might take place within.

I was determined to get a glimpse into this strange Temple if at all possible, and, on walking round, found that it backed on to the high wall surrounding the 'Abode'. It stood about two feet away from this wall, and it struck me that with a little agility I

might edge my way up a sufficient distance, so as to be able to peep through the stained glass window set some six or seven feet above ground level. About a couple of feet above the base of the Temple wall was a slight brick projection, sloping slightly to allow the rain to run off.

By placing my feet upon this sort of ledge, and my back against the outer wall I was able to wriggle my way up until I reached window level. With my eye glued to one of the less opaque bits of leaded glass I succeeded in peering into the place which was set out as an ordinary chapel, with pews facing the altar.

I am afraid I did not glean much from my view, so I decided to make my way round to the house itself. On the right of the Temple was a well-kept lawn shaded by trees, and on this lawn, as I made my way round to the back of the house, were a number of newly hatched-out chickens, strutting about 'pecking up the grubs and worms which they found there.'

I had no idea how I was to reach the front of the house, and simply made up my mind to walk right round until I came to the front porch which I knew from photographs published in the district.

All the time I was hoping that nobody would intercept me and tell me that I was trespassing. On my right, and built very close to the high wall which surrounded the 'Abode', was a row of tiny picturesque cottages, scrupulously clean, their white fronts gleaming in the sun.

I did not know whether someone might pop out from one of these cottages, and insist on my leaving the place, in which case I should reluctantly have been compelled to accede to their request unless they had agreed to take me to Mr. Hamilton.

Two fine conservatories, ablaze with choice blqoms, flanked the cottages at the farther side of the lawn, whilst immediately in front of me a vista of beauty stretched out over the downs, one of the most beautiful views it is possible to imagine.

In the distance I could see the black-clad figure of a woman strolling in the grounds, and I halted a moment to allow her to pass from view. Huge trees shaded the newly-mown lawn,

leading up to a terrace at the far end of the ground, whilst a number of picturesque little buildings were dotted about here and there.

Skirting the rest of the building, I came to the front of the house, a wonderful old-world gabled building, long and roomy, looking out over an expanse of lawn from which it was divided by a fine gravel path. Just before I came to the house I espied a large out-building of red stone similar to that of which the house was built. There was a large gate at the side opening into a sort of loose box, whilst on the gate was a notice: 'Please keep gate shut, dog loose'.

The door of this one-storied building was open, and I could see that it was sumptuously furnished like an outdoor sitting-room. Passing on to the big porch that fronted the mansion itself, I was amazed to find the door open. The next moment two dogs dashed out snarling and snapping. I spoke to them in a friendly voice, but they continued to growl and sniff suspiciously until a voice from inside the huge hall called them in.

Then I beheld an elderly, pleasant-faced lady, some sixty years of age I should imagine, attired in a very voluminous sort of dress not a bit like the new look of to-day. She was holding a book in her hand, and had evidently been sitting in the spacious hall with its polished floor, reading and taking advantage of the fresh air.

She looked at me inquiringly, and I wondered whether this woman was the first and legal wife of the late Smyth-Piggott who had faded into the background when he took unto himself Ruth Preece, a member of his congregation at the 'Ark of the Covenant' at Clapton, when she fell beneath his spell, and became his 'spiritual bride'.

The woman standing before me was a well-preserved woman, with kindly eyes and distinct charm. Her hair was grey, as were the eyes that continued to gaze at me in inquiry, and without beating about the bush I at once asked her whether I might speak to Mr. Hamilton.

She was undoubtedly surprised at the intrusion of a stranger

in the 'Abode', but in a pleasing mellow voice she replied without hesitation: 'I think so—I will go and see'.

With that she moved away, and I was aware of yet another figure in the background, a slim, dark-haired woman much younger than the one to whom I had spoken and whom I seemed to recognise as an elderly version of 'Sister Ruth', the mother of the three children of Smyth-Piggott, known to the world as 'Glory', 'Power', sometimes known as Panion, and Lavetia, known as 'Light'.

The latter was a dark-haired young beauty and could, I was told, often be seen walking about the village with other members of the sect. She was distinctly like her mother in appearance.

'Sister Ruth', I gathered, could also be seen about on rare occasions, although whenever any of the colony went out, they generally drove off in one of the five or six fine motor-cars which are garaged in the 'Abode', to get away to some place where they might enjoy themselves unrecognised.

The dark-haired woman who entered the hall at the sound of strange voices regarded me with interest for a moment, and then she hastened out of the way. I stood at the door waiting and gazing around me.

The house was tastefully decorated and through its large windows one could see that the rooms were elegantly furnished. I gazed up at the windows above me, and caught a glimpse of yet another woman looking down from behind a blue curtain, but she immediately withdrew when she realised that I had seen her.

And then—I heard footsteps in the hall, and the next moment saw a fine-looking, well-set-up, elderly man approaching me, holding a pair of pince-nez between his long, tapering fingers. A pair of large grey eyes, set in a healthy-looking face tanned by the recent sun, regarded me carefully.

They were smiling, kindly eyes, and there was nothing of anger in them at the knowledge that I had made my way into the 'Abode' without permission.

Fine, white hair, parted in the middle and allowed to droop over the forehead, gave an indication of the age of this man who,

from the length of time he has lived at the 'Abode of Love', must have been over 70, yet did not look not a day older than 50 to 55.

'Good morning,' said a pleasant voice, and the grey eyes beamed at me in the most friendly manner. The man was cultured both in voice and demeanour.

'Good morning,' I replied, and made up my mind to go straight to the point without further ado. 'Mr. Hamilton,' I said, 'I am a newspaper man, and in view of the fact that so many lurid stories have been related in connection with the sect to which you belong, and that so many sensational, and maybe untruthful, reports have been circulated regarding what goes on in the "Abode of Love", I would like to give you the opportunity of telling the public the real facts.'

The eyes never lost their kindly expression, but placing a hand on my shoulder he said, 'My dear fellow, I can say nothing. It is against all our rules. I'm very sorry.'

Mr. Hamilton commenced to walk towards the huge gates, thus intimating that there was nothing more to say. But I did not follow him. I stood gazing around me at the beautiful surroundings.

'I am very sorry, too,' I remarked, 'for I feel that some pronouncement direct from you would do much to clear away any misapprehensions that may exist regarding the "Abode" and the nature of its beliefs.'

'I must not talk to you,' was the response. 'I can tell you nothing.'

And he began to walk towards the gates. After walking a few feet, I stood still and gazed around me. We were not very far from the graves where lie buried all that was mortal of Brother Prince who died in 1899, and of Smyth-Piggott, who succeeded him.

Douglas Hamilton, or to give him his full name, Edward Douglas Malcolmson Hamilton, had closed the eyes of Prince in death, and had recited the solemn burial ritual over his grave, upon which the huge windows of the dining-room at the 'Abode' look out.

He had also been present when Smyth-Piggott, the second self-styled 'Messiah', died in March, 1927, and had performed the last solemn rites in connection with 'The Master'. No man living could tell the real facts behind the mysterious colony of Agape-monites other than Douglas Hamilton, and once more I pressed him.

'It simply occurred to me, sir, that perhaps you could give the public some brief idea as to what the beliefs of the sect are, and whether converts are in any way sought.'

'I cannot say a word,' was the steadfast reply. 'It is against the rules.'

'But who makes the rules?' I queried, and again came the answer, 'I can tell you nothing.'

'Is it not possible for you to give me just the barest idea as to the tenets of your creed and the nature of your ceremonials?' I insisted, but the charming, cultured man, who might well have been excused if he had shown some impatience at having been trespassed upon, and then badgered in connection with his faith, whatever it may be, smiled once more, and in a quiet voice replied:

'I am extremely sorry, but really Mr. O'Donnell, I must not talk to you. I appreciate your honesty in telling me straight away that you were a newspaper man, but it is entirely against the rules for me to tell you anything. I am sorry.'

By this time I realised that there was not much hope of gaining the information I wanted, but still I was loath to leave the beautiful grounds without one further effort, and so I turned once more to the tall man whose graceful carriage was remarkable for his age, and who looked more like a dear old country gentleman than 'The Master' of a sect concerning which the most terrible things had been written and said, and against which charges of flagrant immorality have been made without acknowledgment or denial.

'Seeing that I have got thus far,' I said, 'would it not be possible for you to show me round your beautiful grounds?' I thought that maybe if we got walking together for any length of time the

barrier might be broken down, and Mr. Hamilton might tell me something of the sect. But again came the statement that it would be against the rules, and so, with a final glance round the fine old place, I walked with him towards the heavily studded gate set in the huge ten-foot wall.

'You have a very lovely place here—you should be extremely happy,' I remarked.

'Yes—it is very beautiful,' he replied, and turned the key in the gate which he held open for me to pass out. He held out his hand.

'I greatly appreciate your good faith in telling me who you were, Mr. O'Donnell,' he said, 'and—we part the best of friends I hope.'

We shook hands and a second later the heavy gate clanged to behind me and once more I was outside this place which combined the appearance of a cloister and a fortress.

'Brother' Hamilton is still living, but neither 'Sister Ruth' nor Smyth-Piggott's legal wife are alive to-day. On the death of Smyth-Piggott in 1927 his will revealed that he had left the whole of his property to his 'spiritual wife'.

Dated 6th March, 1926, it stated: 'All I die possessed of I leave to Ruth Annie Smyth, the loved, honoured and devoted mother of my three children.'

It provided that if in the meantime 'Sister Ruth' died the property should go to their three children, David, Power and Lavita. Nothing was left to Smyth-Piggott's legal wife.

The latter died in 1933 at the age of 85. She was buried in the grounds of the 'Abode' as her husband had been. 'Sister Ruth' died two or three years later, and was buried in the same grounds.

I had hoped for so much when I set out to enter the 'Abode'. I had visions of being able to persuade Douglas Hamilton to come out with some sensational denial of the stories which had been published about the place and its inmates. I had dreams of coming away with the first authentic story of what the Agapemonites believed, and the nature of the rites carried out behind the walls of this strange temple. I had even pictured myself being shown round this place about which such intriguing stories had been

circulated throughout the years, and even being introduced to some of its women devotees. Better still would have been an exclusive interview with 'Sister Ruth' or one of her three children.

It did not happen that way. I succeeded in none of these things, and I emphasise my downfall simply to illustrate how thorny indeed is the path of a reporter, crime or general.

## *Hanged by a Matchstick*

As I seem to end on a more than usually sombre note, it is because the story I am about to relate is one that will live for ever in my memory as one of the most macabre experiences in the whole of my career.

It is the 'story behind the story' of the Charing Cross Trunk Murder, one of the most sensational crimes of this century. It is, I will, a story that I alone among newspaper men can tell.

When John Robinson with trembling fingers lit a cigarette after dismembering the body of Mrs. Minnie Bonati and packing it into the large black trunk which he afterwards deposited at Charing Cross Station cloakroom, he committed one of those mistakes which murderers so frequently commit. From his bloodstained fingers he flung that match into the waste-paper basket in the office where he had carried out his gruesome task. When, too, he placed a dirty bloodstained duster in the trunk with the remains of his victim and flung away a railway cloakroom ticket, he finally and completely sealed his doom.

For it was these three things—the cloakroom ticket, the dirty duster, and the bloodstained match which led to his arrest and helped to prove his guilt. But for them, it might well be that this crime would have been written down in the long list of 'unsolved murder mysteries'.

Mrs. Bonati was a married woman living apart from her husband, and under the protection of another man. This did not prevent her from enjoying the friendship of many other men whom she met casually in saloon bars.

In justice to Robinson I mention these facts, for it was just a chance meeting with this woman that led him to the scaffold.

Robinson came out of a post-office at Victoria, met Mrs. Bonati, whom he had never seen before, and she accompanied him to his office in Rochester Row, where he carried on a failing business as an estate agent. She was never seen alive again.

A day or two later a large black trunk was deposited in the cloakroom at Charing Cross railway station. Some time elapsed and then a certain unpleasant odour drew attention to the trunk, with the result that it was opened. Inside were found the dismembered remains of a woman's body amid a mass of blood-stained clothes.

At once the police were summoned and Chief Inspector George Cornish was put in charge of the investigations. I got the tip and was early on the scene just as they were taking the trunk away with its gruesome contents.

It was a taxi-driver who first gave the information which linked Robinson with the crime, and it was through him that I obtained such knowledge as caused me to see Robinson and have a chat with him.

To give an account of all the various moves in that chase after all manner of clues, good and otherwise, would be wearying. It is better to tell the story in its sequence.

Following the arrival of Robinson and Mrs. Bonati at his office, the woman, according to Robinson, assumed a threatening attitude towards him. She demanded more money than he felt inclined to give, and when she made towards him, he gave her a push. That was Robinson's version of what happened. He added that the woman staggered back and fell striking her head on a fender. Robinson declared that he left her there, and went out telling her to get out as quick as she liked.

He did not go to the office again till the next morning, and this is the story of what he found as told by him in statements to the police.

'I went to the office at the usual time in the morning and on going into the inner office I saw the woman lying face downwards on the carpet or mat, her right arm was doubled up beneath her. I took her by the shoulder and turned her on her

back. I saw that she was dead, and I moved the body beneath the window.'

There was method in his madness. The Rochester Row police station is just opposite the shop above which Robinson rented his room, and doubtless he realised that anyone from a window across the road would be able to see the body of a woman lying on the floor if he left it where he had found it.

So he dragged it to a spot between two windows where the body would be out of sight. Having done this he 'sat down' in a chair to review the position. 'I sat there for about five or ten minutes, and then arrived at the conclusion that I had better find some means of disposing of the body. I decided to cut it into pieces, and put it into parcels. I went out to Victoria, and bought paper and string, and a knife, and then returned to my office, and started to dismember the body. Such of the clothing as I could take off I did take off; the remainder I cut off'.

All that afternoon Robinson stayed in that office of death, keeping guard over the ghastly remains. In the evening he went to meet his wife, and the next morning went again to the office.

'I saw the body still there and I realised the impossibility of disposing of it as it was, and I decided to buy a trunk.'

He actually got *another* man to purchase the trunk for him, and packed the remains of his victim into it. Then on the Friday (the tragedy having occurred on the Wednesday) he went to the office and 'tidied it up', washing away the bloodstains and putting the furniture in its place.

During the days immediately after the crime, the office was 'open as usual for any clients to come along', the trunk with its grisly contents standing in an alcove beside the fireplace. Later on he got a taxi-driver to help him downstairs with the trunk. 'It's a bit heavy because it is full of books,' he explained.

He was driven to Charing Cross station where he deposited it in the 'left luggage' cloakroom.

He chose the busiest time of the day when the attendants would not be so likely to remember him. And but for one mistake he might never have been identified. Having got rid of the

trunk, he entered a taxi in the station yard, and drove off. Thinking to rid himself of any incriminating clues he flung the tell-tale cloakroom ticket from the window of the cab. A fatal error, as it happened, for a newsboy who saw the fluttering piece of paper, picked it up, and thought how careless some people were.

He took it at once to the cloakroom, and handed it to the man who had just taken in the trunk. 'I expect the bloke who lost it will be back,' he remarked. *This simple incident fixed in the mind of the cloakroom attendant the description of the man who had handed in the trunk.* But for this casual happening, with all the hundreds of people depositing parcels day by day, he would doubtless have forgotten what the man was like who had brought the trunk.

As it was, he remembered him clearly, a tall well-built man with fair hair and blue eyes.

I wonder how many times the danger of relying on circumstantial evidence has been raised by the defence in a murder trial. How often has counsel endeavoured to influence a jury by pointing out that there was no direct evidence against the man he was defending. I have heard this line of argument put forward time and time again in criminal courts up and down the country and it has been left to the judge to point out that in many instances circumstantial evidence may be more certain and conclusive in proving the guilt of a person than the most direct of direct evidence.

One has only to realise how differently two or more eye-witnesses of the self-same incident will describe what happened. Their evidence will often vary to such substantial extent that juries find it difficult to decide which is in fact the right version. With circumstantial evidence the same difficulty is not so likely to arise. The pieces invariably fit in with jigsaw-like precision making a complete whole, and all a jury need do is to bring their intelligence to bear as to whether they can accept or reject such evidence.

My friend George Cornish, who was in charge of the investigations, promptly issued a description and photograph of the trunk in which the body had been found, together with a descrip-

tion of the man who had deposited it in the cloakroom. A taxi-driver remembered driving a man with such a trunk from somewhere in Rochester Row on 6th May. Clue number one!

The police interviewed *everybody* in all the offices in that street, taking some one hundred and fifty statements in all. Amongst them was one by Robinson. Apparently he was able to satisfy the detectives as to his movements, for he was allowed to leave the Yard where the interrogation had taken place. The police also searched his office as it was rather suspicious that he had written a letter to his landlord on the very day on which the trunk had been deposited, giving up the office. They found nothing to connect Robinson with the crime, although they were strongly suspicious. I knew this, and it was at this period of the inquiries that I decided to seek him out. I ran him to earth at his lodgings, and found him to be a well-spoken, good-looking fellow with a certain charm of manner which was somewhat spoilt by a trace of braggadocio.

He told me all he had told the police, readily and without any hesitation, and I got the impression there and then that the story was too glib. It was too well rehearsed and word perfect.

I drew him out and learned something of his life story. How he had served in the army in Egypt from 1914 till 1917, when he was invalided out with trench-feet and rheumatism. Later he joined the army again, and served in Ireland. It was here that he met the woman who was now his wife, he told me, carefully omitting to mention that his marriage to her was a bigamous one, he having already been married way back in 1912.

Of course, it was not till afterwards that I learned of this first marriage. In the meantime I had discovered that his 'wife' was working at a public-house at Hammersmith, and I interviewed her there. She was a dear little woman, who loved this man with all her heart. She had worked for him and kept him, when, owing to rheumatism, he could not work himself. She had nursed him through many long illnesses, and even when she learned that he had been previously married, and that she was only a wife in name, it made no difference. She stood by him.

Meanwhile the police were pursuing their inquiries. In the trunk with the mutilated remains of the dead woman they had found a duster, dirty and bloodstained. It had been searched for any mark which would help to identify its origin, but without success. Train after train of investigation had been followed up apparently without success. On the morning of 23rd May, a newspaper came out with the statement that it looked as though the 'Charing Cross Trunk Murder' would have to be written down as another unsolved mystery.

On the previous night I had seen Robinson at a club in Walworth Road, of which he had recently become a member. From one of the other members I learned casually that he had been telling some tale about his being one of the detectives engaged in trying to solve the trunk crime mystery. This struck me as a rather strange thing to say, and more like the braggart utterance of a guilty man than the sensible comment of an innocent one.

Robinson seemed to be in high spirits and I tried to draw him out. I got him to go over the story he had told me before, and again it was word perfect. There was no variation in any single detail, and—this made me more than ever convinced of his guilt.

Meanwhile George Cornish gave orders that all the clues and statements in their possession should be reviewed. He himself took the duster and washed it clean. There he found clue number two. What had so far been concealed by blood and dirt now revealed its message. There, faintly but surely in faded ink was the name of a Hammersmith public-house—*the house where Robinson's 'wife' was employed*.

At the same time there came into the hands of the police information from a friend of a man who had bought the trunk from a second-hand dealer in Brixton—not for himself but for Robinson. So yet another finger of suspicion was pointed at Robinson.

The police made a further search of the office in Rochester Row. Every inch of the room was combed. At last, caught up between the canes of a waste-paper basket they found a blood-

stained match. On analysis the blood was found to be of the same group as that of the murdered woman. Clue number three!

The chain of evidence was complete, and Robinson was arrested, formally charged and remanded to Brixton Gaol. I had not been idle. When I saw how things were shaping I got in touch with Mrs. Robinson. I accompanied her to Brixton Prison to let the accused know that his defence had been arranged for. On our arrival we entered a large room with high windows heavily barred. There was a long table, across the centre of which was a glass partition some few inches in height. This is a precaution to prevent anybody passing anything to a prisoner by sliding it across the table.

It was into this room that John Robinson came, he sitting at one end of the table, his 'wife' and I sitting at the other. Two warders sat between us. He recognised me and gave me a brief nod. Then he turned to the woman at my side greeting her with a merry smile. He was quite cheerful, especially when he knew he was to be adequately defended.

'Don't you worry, Annie,' he told his wife, who sat there trying to stem her tears, 'I will soon be out of this, and I don't mean to let you go on as you have been doing. I'm going to keep you in the future.'

Then he spoke about a green coat she used to wear. 'Why haven't you got it on?' he asked, for it was one he had bought for her.

'I burnt it,' she replied. 'Green is unlucky, and when this happened, I burnt the thing. I hated it.'

Robinson laughed heartily at this and tried to joke about her superstition, but she was in deadly earnest. She told me how, just before she came to England from Tasmania, she had visited a fortune-teller, who warned her against violets as being a flower which would bring her bad luck. And the first flowers which Robinson bought for her after their first meeting were violets. They were his favourite flowers.

Robinson was brought to trial. There, the defence sought to establish that Mrs. Bonati had struck her head against the fender

when she fell, and had then died from asphyxiation through falling on her face on the rug. But the evidence of Sir Bernard Spilsbury proved beyond doubt that the woman had been suffocated with a cushion or some soft material pressed over mouth and nose.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty. Robinson listened unmoved except for a nervous moistening of lips with tongue. But it was in a firm resonant voice that he replied 'No, my lord,' when Mr. Justice Swift asked him whether he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon him. A few minutes later Mrs. Robinson visited him in the cell beneath the Old Bailey assuring him again of her love and comforting him all she could although her own heart was breaking.

During the days that followed I accompanied her whenever she visited her husband in prison, the death call at Pentonville Prison, and during our journey to and fro I learned a little more about the romance of these two people.

Their first meeting in Dublin was rather romantic. You will remember how the Tasmanian fortune-teller had warned her against violets, and said they would be unlucky for her?

On her arrival in Dublin she was given a bunch of flowers in the very centre of which was one of the very kind she had been warned against. She dropped them to the ground, feeling that they boded her ill.

She accepted a position as barmaid at an American bar there, where there were always a number of jolly 'khaki boys' seeking a brief respite from their duties. One day one of them asked her to go out with him the next afternoon and she accepted the invitation. She had seen him in the bar several times, and thus knew him slightly. The next afternoon she went with another girl friend to the meeting place, having taken with her a packet of cigarettes for the soldier. On it, just for a joke, she had scribbled, 'If you're single, drop a line, if you're married never mind.'

The man who had arranged to meet her was unfortunately detained for duty that afternoon, and after waiting some time, she and her friend decided to stroll back to the hotel. On their

way they met another soldier, a sergeant this time, and he smiled at them but passed on. The girls turned their heads to see whether he would dare to look round as he appeared to be so nervous, and just at that moment he also turned, and—came back to them.

The man was John Robinson and that was his first meeting with the woman whom he so cruelly deceived. All along she naturally believed that she really was his wife. It was to him that she gave the cigarettes intended for the other man, and he laughed over the little inscription she had scribbled across the packet. After that Robinson became a regular customer at the bar where his sweetheart was employed.

They were married and came to England. There were times when Robinson suffered with his feet so badly that he was unable to work. Mrs. Robinson went out to work to keep him. In fact there was never a time when her husband ever kept her.

In spite of the woman's sincere affection for him, Robinson had a number of 'affairs' with other women and he was frequently in trouble with husbands and sweethearts.

He was elected to one working men's club, and repaid his sponsor by suggesting to the man's wife, *actually after the murder of Mrs. Bonati*, that she should elope with him.

On the very evening of the day on which he killed Mrs. Bonati, Robinson and his club acquaintance had a fierce fight outside the premises. The men were separated, and the husband had to stay in bed for a week, while Robinson suffered from a black eye and torn lip.

It is worth relating here that Robinson had a strong belief in good and bad luck, and was of the opinion that the figure '3' was extremely unlucky for him. It certainly appears to have played some part in important events in his life. Thus he was married on the third day of the third month, in 1923. He was arrested on the 23rd May, and sentenced to death on the 13th July.

Throughout all the interviews which followed, right up to the time of his death, Robinson maintained a cheerful demeanour and persisted that his story of the crime was the true one. On the

afternoon before he was to die the next morning, he gazed straight into the eyes of his wife.

'You can tell them that whatever else can be said about me, I did not kill that woman intentionally, and I would not lie to you at this moment, Annie,' he said.

And then he turned to her at the last moment of farewell, and in a voice that shook with emotion he cried, 'You will be in my thoughts to the last heartbeat, darling, and I know I shall be in yours.'

That was the last time that Annie Robinson saw her husband alive but—it was not the last time her eyes looked upon him.

As we left the prison on the eve of Robinson's execution and passed through the little wicket gate set in the heavily studded doors giving access to the gaol, a man approached me, and drew me aside from my companion.

'I am the Coroner's Officer,' he said, 'I have come to tell Mrs. Robinson that she is entitled to be present at the inquest upon John Robinson after the execution, but need not do so if she does not want to.' He paused, and then in a quiet voice, spoke in an aside to me. 'It might prove very distressing for her,' he said, 'and I thought if I spoke to you, you might be able to persuade her not to attend.'

I thanked him and then explained the position to Mrs. Robinson.

'If I were you I think I should stay away,' I suggested. 'It is bound to be a bit of an ordeal, and you have been through quite enough.'

But in spite of my persuasions Mrs. Robinson was firm in her resolution to attend the inquest.

'I shall go, Bernard,' she said. 'I will be as near to him as I can be till the end.' Then she added, 'You will come with me.'

The next morning I called at the humble lodgings where Mrs. Robinson was staying. I stood silent as she and her landlady knelt down in the little room she occupied, and, Bible in hand, prayed together for the soul of the man who was so soon to be sent to his doom. Then together we set off on our sorry errand.

As we drove through the London streets towards Pentonville Prison I noticed that she kept looking out of the car window. Suddenly she turned to me.

'If you see a florist's open, please stop,' she said. 'I want to get some flowers.'

So all the way to our destination we kept a look out for any place where we could get some flowers, but all in vain. The shops were not yet open. At length we reached the gaol. Already the notice declaring that 'judgment of death had been executed on John Robinson' was posted on the prison gate.

The inquest was of the usual formal nature, the only evidence being that of the doctor who examined the body and pronounced that death was instantaneous.

Then came the most dramatic scene I have ever witnessed at such an inquest. Dramatic, despite the quietness and calm with which Mrs. Robinson rose to her seat and asked permission to see the body of her 'husband'. Such a request is rare indeed for few women dare face so grim an ordeal. The court was startled but—her wish was granted.

Then—accompanied by two prison officers, Mrs. Robinson and I were led to the mortuary where the dead man lay. There was nothing unsightly about the appearance of Robinson as the mortuary-keeper pulled aside the sheet which covered the body. I stood on one side of Annie Robinson, a prison officer ~~on~~ the other, ready to assist her if she should show signs of collapse.

Not even a tremor shook the slender woman as she gazed down on that lifeless form.

And then she stooped down and seized him in her arms. She cradled his head against her breast and crooned to him as though she were crooning to a babe. At length she laid him to rest once more, but before the mortuary-keeper could replace the sheet, she snatched off the hat she was wearing. It was trimmed with a little bunch of artificial violets—Robinson's favourite flower. She tore them off, and after pressing the flowers to her lips she placed them upon the breast of the man who had been everything to her.

'You will bury them with him?' she begged the officers with

her. They nodded assent, and with firm unwavering steps Mrs. Robinson left behind all that was mortal of the only man who had brought romance into her life.

I feel I must mention that throughout her ordeal Annie Robinson was convinced of the innocence of her husband. She was also incensed against the police for their part in bringing Robinson to justice. Quite unreasonably, as I tried to point out on more than one occasion. A day or two after the execution she came to me in my office at Kemsley House.

'Bernard,' she said. 'I want you to do me a favour. I am not going to have that trunk kicking around Scotland Yard. It belongs to me and I'm going to have it. I have written to the Yard to ask for it—but—I've got nowhere to put it. Will you have it sent to your home? You can burn it or do what you like with it; but I am determined that the police shan't have it.'

I did my best to persuade her that it would be much better to let this gruesome relic remain where it was, but to no avail. Quite frankly I did not fancy going home to my wife and casually remarking, 'Oh—by the way, dear, if a big black trunk arrives from Scotland Yard, just get them to drop it in the back garden.' I know she would have asked what trunk it was, and like a dutiful husband I should have been bound to tell her with assumed nonchalance, 'The one that Robinson packed the body in.'

Fortunately I was spared this unpleasant task, for the authorities refused to deliver up the receptacle which had played so sinister a part in the Charing Cross Trunk Murder, and to-day it reposes among other equally sinister relics of notorious crimes in the Black Museum at Scotland Yard.

For a time Annie Robinson returned to her old job as barmaid at various public-houses in London. She came to see me now and again until she went up north. Then I received a letter telling me that she was going back to her beloved Tasmania.

Just another ship that passed in the night. One of the many who have flashed across the pages of my diary as a crime reporter.































